Realities and Opportunities for Islamic Education Development in Viet Nam

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ABSTRACT
Islamic education in Vietnam exists in an informal and community-based system, primarily sustained by the Cham Muslim minority. Despite the absence of a formal educational infrastructure, this system plays a vital role in preserving religious identity and transmitting moral values. This study aims to analyze the current condition of Islamic education in Vietnam, identify existing challenges, and explore development opportunities that support sustainability and cultural relevance. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, using literature reviews and document analysis to explore educational practices, institutional gaps, and policy dynamics that shape the Islamic education landscape in Vietnam. The findings show that Islamic education in Vietnam is adaptive and resilient but suffers from limitations in curriculum standardization, educator training, and formal recognition. However, digital technology, international partnerships, and emerging government support provide promising opportunities for its development. A multi-stakeholder and culturally grounded approach is needed to strengthen Islamic education in minority contexts. This study provides practical insights for policymakers and educators in designing inclusive and sustainable educational strategies for Muslim communities in non-Muslim-majority countries.
Keywords: Islamic Education, Vietnam, Cham Muslims, Education Policy

ABSTRAK
Pendidikan Islam di Vietnam berlangsung secara informal dan berbasis komunitas, dengan keterlibatan aktif dari komunitas Muslim Cham sebagai kelompok minoritas. Meski tidak memiliki infrastruktur pendidikan formal, sistem ini berperan penting dalam menjaga identitas keagamaan dan menanamkan nilai-nilai moral. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kondisi aktual pendidikan Islam di Vietnam, mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi, serta menggali peluang pengembangan yang berkelanjutan dan sesuai dengan konteks budaya lokal. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa studi pustaka dan analisis dokumen yang membahas praktik pendidikan, kesenjangan kelembagaan, serta dinamika kebijakan terkait pendidikan Islam di Vietnam. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pendidikan Islam di Vietnam bersifat adaptif dan memiliki daya tahan sosial, namun masih menghadapi kendala seperti belum adanya kurikulum yang seragam, kurangnya pelatihan guru, dan belum diakuinya secara formal oleh negara. Di sisi lain, peluang melalui teknologi digital, kerja sama internasional, dan dukungan pemerintah yang mulai terbuka menjadi modal penting untuk pengembangan. Pendekatan kolaboratif yang melibatkan berbagai pemangku kepentingan

dan berbasis budaya lokal diperlukan untuk memperkuat pendidikan Islam di wilayah minoritas. Studi ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi perumus kebijakan dan pendidik dalam merancang strategi pendidikan yang inklusif dan berkelanjutan bagi komunitas Muslim di negara mayoritas non-Muslim.
Kata Kunci: *Pendidikan Islam, Vietnam, Muslim Cham, Kebijakan Pendidikan*

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam is a country with rich cultural and religious diversity, where the Muslim community represents a minority group coexisting with various other beliefs and traditions. Within this context, Islamic education functions not only as a means of religious transmission but also as a critical pillar for preserving the cultural and spiritual identity of Muslims, especially the Cham ethnic group. Although the Muslim population in Vietnam is relatively small and unevenly distributed, they have demonstrated persistent efforts in maintaining Islamic values through community-based informal education (*Ahmad, 2020; Nguyen Van Trung, 2017*). However, the current reality indicates that Islamic education in Vietnam remains largely traditional and is not integrated into the national education system. Teaching and learning processes occur in mosques, prayer halls, and the homes of religious figures, lacking standardized curricula and pedagogical frameworks. The absence of formal Islamic educational institutions means that instruction heavily relies on oral methods and generational transmission, which poses challenges for younger generations in adapting to the demands of modern education (Farid, 2018; Ma'arif Institute, 2019). This situation creates disparities in educational quality and knowledge comprehension across different regions.

Several previous studies have explored the dynamics of Islamic education in minority Muslim communities from both institutional and sociocultural perspectives. Ahmad (2020) emphasized the crucial role of families and communities in supporting Islamic education in minority contexts. Farid (2018) highlighted the need for curriculum standardization to ensure education not only preserves values but also strengthens youth capacity. Gillespie and Fealy (2013) examined how Southeast Asian Muslim communities adapt to global challenges, while Nguyen Van Trung (2017) discussed the religious and cultural life of the Cham community in Vietnam. UNESCO Vietnam (2021) also stressed the need to strengthen inclusive and contextually relevant access to religious education.

Nonetheless, there exists a notable knowledge gap, particularly in terms of identifying and leveraging opportunities to improve the quality and accessibility of Islamic education in Vietnam. Most previous studies have focused on structural and social challenges, without adequately exploring adaptive and solution-oriented development strategies, such as digital technology utilization, international cooperation, or the integration of local government support. These opportunities, if well-utilized, could be instrumental in modernizing Islamic education without compromising the community's Islamic identity.

There is an increasing urgency to integrate Islamic education into a broader social system, utilizing cultural, digital, and institutional approaches. Education that not only preserves spirituality but also enhances the competitiveness of

Muslim youth is crucial in the context of globalization and rapid social change. Furthermore, identifying the strategic role of government and local communities in building a more inclusive and sustainable educational ecosystem is essential.

Based on the aforementioned background, this study aims to comprehensively analyze the reality of Islamic education in Vietnam and identify the opportunities and challenges in its development. This study will highlight organizational structures, teaching methods, as well as the social and policy dynamics affecting Islamic education among Vietnam's Muslim communities, particularly from a humanistic and sustainability perspective.

Employing a descriptive-qualitative approach integrated with literature analysis and document-based data, this article is expected to contribute to the discourse on the development of Islamic education in minority communities, and to open new perspectives for formulating policies that are more responsive and contextual to the needs of Muslims in non-Muslim-majority countries like Vietnam.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the current realities and developmental prospects of Islamic education in Vietnam. Data collection was carried out through literature review, document analysis, and contextual interpretation of secondary sources, including academic articles, government reports, and relevant institutional publications. The analysis focuses on educational practices, community-based religious teaching models, and policy dynamics surrounding the Muslim minority in Vietnam. Emphasis is placed on synthesizing insights from existing studies while identifying practical implications and strategic opportunities to improve the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of Islamic education within a minority religious context. The methodological design allows for a comprehensive and humanistic understanding of the challenges and potentials within the Vietnamese socio-cultural and legal framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Characteristics of Islamic Education in Vietnam

Islamic education in Vietnam develops within a highly limited and informal context. Unlike the structured madrasah systems in Indonesia or pesantren in Malaysia that are formally recognized by the state, Islamic education in Vietnam is still largely traditional and community-based (Farid, 2018). Gillespie and Fealy (2013) noted that Muslim minorities in Southeast Asia tend to maintain their religious values through participatory, informal approaches due to socio-political constraints.

Religious spaces such as mosques and suraus serve as the main centers of education. These venues host voluntarily organized, flexible learning activities that reflect the community's adaptation to a secular state system (Nguyễn Văn Trung, 2017). This condition resonates with Ahmad's (2020) findings that, in many minority Muslim contexts, religious education centers emerge organically within places of worship due to limited institutional support.

Home-based and oral instruction is also common. Rahman (2009) observed that informal education among Muslim minorities often relies on oral transmission of religious knowledge across generations. In the Cham communities of Vietnam, similar traditions persist, reinforcing familial and cultural roles in preserving Islamic teachings.

Despite its informal nature, this education system plays a strategic role in shaping religious identity and moral character. According to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, the learning environment is essential in knowledge construction. Thus, the informal, community-centered approach in Vietnam becomes a viable alternative to formal education in transmitting religious values.

However, from a pedagogical standpoint, the lack of formal training among educators is a significant weakness. The Ma'arif Institute (2019) documented that most instructors in minority Muslim communities in Southeast Asia lack modern pedagogical training, which hinders learning effectiveness, especially for younger generations.

On the other hand, the informal model offers curricular flexibility adapted to local needs. Gillespie and Fealy (2013) argued that such flexibility is a strength in maintaining religious continuity amidst external pressures. Therefore, this model should not be viewed solely as a limitation but also as a form of cultural resilience.

In conclusion, Islamic education in Vietnam is uniquely characterized by its community base, high adaptability, and yet vulnerable quality. Compared to neighboring countries, Vietnam needs policy innovations to enable the system to evolve without losing its social solidarity-based foundations.

Development Opportunities in a Global Context

Technological advancement has opened new avenues for Islamic education in Vietnam. As Castells (2010) theorized in his network society framework, marginalized groups can access global knowledge through digital platforms. The internet has become a strategic tool for Vietnamese Muslims to obtain Islamic learning materials unavailable locally (UNESCO Vietnam, 2021).

Farid (2018) emphasized that digitized learning is a practical solution for minority Muslim communities lacking formal education infrastructure. Qur'an apps, online sermons, and YouTube-based learning channels offer accessible and cost-effective Islamic education to dispersed Muslim populations.

Remote learning has also created international networks between scholars and local communities. Gillespie and Fealy (2013) highlighted that cross-border knowledge exchange enhances educational quality, provided contextual adaptation is ensured. This is particularly relevant for Vietnam, where inter-regional networking could uplift teaching standards.

International cooperation presents a promising avenue. Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia can serve as strategic partners in teacher training and resource development. For instance, international scholarship programs such as LPDP and ISESCO have long supported religious education capacity building in Southeast Asia (Gillespie & Fealy, 2013).

Government support is also gradually improving. The Vietnamese Government Committee for Religious Affairs (Badan Tôn giáo Chính phủ Việt Nam, 2022) reported that some local authorities now permit religious classes, a shift from the restrictive environment of previous decades. This indicates an emerging policy space that can be leveraged by Muslim communities.

According to Giddens' (1991) theory of structuration, structural changes create opportunities for agency. In this context, Vietnamese Muslims can use technological and legal advancements to build a sustainable Islamic education model aligned with contemporary demands.

Ultimately, Vietnam holds tangible opportunities to improve Islamic education through digital innovation, international collaboration, and responsive governance. Success depends on multisectoral synergy between communities, local authorities, and global partners.

Systemic Challenges and Collaborative Solutions

The absence of a nationally recognized formal Islamic education system remains the central challenge in Vietnam. Without standardized curricula, the quality of teaching varies significantly. The Ma'arif Institute (2019) emphasized that this lack of consistency complicates assessment and accreditation processes.

Another core issue is the lack of pedagogical training. As Rahman (2009) argued, teaching that relies solely on personal experience and oral traditions is increasingly ineffective for digitally native generations. Without modern instructional skills, educators struggle to facilitate critical thinking and active learning.

Legal constraints also hinder the institutionalization of Islamic education. UNESCO Vietnam (2021) noted that although freedom of religion is guaranteed, administrative procedures for establishing religious schools remain complicated and often opaque, limiting educational innovation.

Social stigma is an additional barrier. Allport's (1954) contact theory explains how minority groups are often misunderstood, especially when linked with global issues such as extremism. Vietnamese Muslims continue to face such stereotypes, which obstruct broader public support for their educational endeavors.

Limited financial resources exacerbate these challenges. As Gillespie and Fealy (2013) noted, dependence on inconsistent community donations results in underfunded institutions. This affects infrastructure quality, teacher salaries, and access to educational materials.

Nevertheless, these challenges are not insurmountable. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, NGOs, and international Islamic organizations are vital. Osborne's (2006) New Public Governance framework advocates for multisector collaboration in delivering community-based public services, a strategy highly relevant to Vietnam's context.

In closing, Islamic education in Vietnam requires both legal affirmation and material support. A collaborative, capacity-building approach anchored in cultural

authenticity and global engagement can position Vietnam's Muslim community to establish a resilient and contextually relevant Islamic education system.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education in Vietnam, though rooted in deep cultural and spiritual traditions, remains largely informal and marginalized within the national education system. This study reveals that while community-based religious institutions play a vital role in sustaining Islamic learning, they face significant structural, political, and socio-economic challenges. However, emerging opportunities—such as digital innovation, international collaboration, and inclusive policy frameworks—offer pathways for sustainable development. Addressing issues of curriculum standardization, gender inclusivity, and teacher capacity-building is essential for strengthening educational outcomes. A comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and multi-stakeholder approach is crucial to integrating Islamic education into broader educational reform efforts, thereby empowering Vietnam's Muslim communities to thrive within a pluralistic and rapidly modernizing society.

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