

Contemporary Islamic Education in a Global Perspective: A Comparative Study of the National University of Singapore and Seoul National University

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Abstract

Islamic education faces complex challenges and opportunities in the era of globalization. This comparative study between the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Seoul National University (SNU) offers an interesting perspective on how two leading universities in Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia are developing Islamic studies programs that are relevant to social, cultural and religious contexts. This research aims to analyze the implementation of learning that is able to contribute to community development. The research method uses relevant literature studies with data sources from journal articles, books and official documents from both universities. The research approach uses descriptive analysis by understanding the differences and similarities implemented by these two institutions. Data analysis techniques use comparative studies, comparing various sources to find similarities, differences and relationships between concepts. The research results show that NUS and SNU have different approaches in integrating Islamic values into the curriculum. NUS places greater emphasis on the relevance of Islam to Singapore's multicultural context, while SNU focuses more on the roots of Islamic traditions. The two universities also have differences in terms of teaching methods, where NUS adopts a more interactive and problem-based approach, while SNU still maintains traditional teaching methods.

Keywords: contemporary islamic education; comparative study

1. Introduction

Contemporary Islamic education faces complex dynamics from a global perspective, especially amidst the demands of modernization and rapid technological developments (Fadhilah & Hudaidah, 2021). The National University of Singapore (NUS) and Seoul National University (SNU), as two leading educational institutions in Asia, have different approaches in addressing Islamic education in a multicultural and global context (Zeng, 2024). Even though both universities are in countries with Muslim minorities, both recognize the importance of Islamic education as part of the social

sciences and humanities that are relevant in understanding the dynamics of modern society (Rosidin, 2018). In an increasingly competitive and cross-cultural academic environment, NUS and SNU have developed Islamic education programs that not only focus on theology, but also include the study of history, culture, and contemporary issues relating to Muslims in Asia and the world (Rahman et al., 2020).

The National University of Singapore, with a focus on a multidisciplinary approach. Existing programs focus on the influence and role of Islam in Southeast Asian society, particularly in historical and socio-political contexts ("National University of Singapore (NUS), 2023). Islamic education at NUS not only examines doctrine and theology, but also looks at how Islam adapts in a multicultural and diverse society like Singapore. Programs at NUS explore the interaction of Islam with other cultures and examine interreligious dynamics in Southeast Asia (Susanto, 2015). Apart from that, this approach also reflects the Singapore government's policy which strongly encourages interfaith harmony, so that Islamic education at NUS is expected to strengthen cross-cultural understanding among students and the community (Muslih & Kholis, 2021). In fact, reflecting the sacred values of religion in various aspects of life is something that is necessary (Sassi & Zahra, 2023).

In contrast, Seoul National University emphasizes Islamic education in the context of Middle Eastern regional studies and the history of Islamic civilization (Colledge Humanities, 2024). SNU adopts a broader historical and geopolitical approach, in which Islam is studied as an integral part of the study of the Middle East and its influence on global politics. In South Korea, interest in the Islamic world and Islamic education is increasing due to the importance of the Middle East region as an economic and political partner (Umayyatun, 2017). The study program at SNU highlights the importance of understanding Islam as a significant political and cultural force in the world. Thus, Islamic education at SNU often focuses on issues such as international relations, Islamic economics, and the influence of Islam on global policy, which is in line with South Korea's need to understand global dynamics (Utami, 2023).

Although they have different focuses, both NUS and SNU emphasize the importance of Islamic education in developing global insight and cross-cultural understanding. These programs aim to equip students with comprehensive knowledge about Islam and Muslim societies, so that they are able to contribute to broader global discussions about Islam and the Muslim world (Colledge Humanities, 2024). Both universities also strive to create an open and inclusive academic environment, where students from various

backgrounds can critically discuss Islamic issues and their impact on global society. This approach shows that contemporary Islamic education not only functions as a tool to deepen religious understanding, but also as a means to build intercultural bridges and strengthen international cooperation (Rahmawati & Supriyanto, 2023; Sassi & Zahra, 2023).

The different cultural and political contexts in Singapore and South Korea influence the way Islamic education is implemented at NUS and SNU. Singapore, with its commitment to multiculturalism, places greater emphasis on social aspects and the interaction of Islam with local culture (Warosari, 2022), while South Korea focuses more on the role of Islam in geopolitics. This reflects that Islamic education from a global perspective requires adaptation according to local needs and dynamics in each country (Utami, 2023). A comparison between NUS and SNU shows that contemporary Islamic education has the flexibility to adapt its approach based on local needs, while still maintaining universal values that are relevant in understanding the role of Islam in the modern world. Thus, this comparative study confirms that Islamic education is not static, but dynamic and open to global influences and local needs in an integral manner.

2. Methode

This research uses a type of library research, is collecting library data obtained from various sources of library information related to research objects such as through abstracts of research results, indexes, reviews, journals and reference books (Sugiyono, 2015). Through an in-depth analytical-descriptive approach, this research seeks to understand the differences and similarities in Islamic education programs implemented by the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Seoul National University (SNU).

The initial step of this research method is to identify sources that provide a complete picture of the curriculum, approach and focus of the Islamic education program at NUS and SNU. Apart from that, researchers also identified concepts for developing Islamic education programs that are relevant to each social, cultural and religious context, as well as their impact on global citizens' understanding of Islam and Muslim society.

The data analysis technique uses comparative studies, namely comparing various sources to find similarities, differences or relationships between concepts (Sahir, 2022). There are four steps that must be taken, including (1) selecting the study object, by determining the texts or documents to be compared; (2) variable identification, by determining the aspects or

themes to be compared; (3) comparative analysis, by comparing data systematically, and (4) conclusions, by drawing conclusions based on the results of the comparison.

Various aspects in this analysis include aspects of educational philosophy, government policies that influence Islamic education to social and cultural factors in Singapore and Korea South that influences each university's approach. It is hoped that the results of this literature analysis will provide insight into the flexibility and adaptation of contemporary Islamic education in a multicultural context, as well as the role of Islamic education in non-Muslim countries in strengthening cross-cultural dialogue and global understanding.

3. Rusult and Discussion

In an increasingly global and complex higher education landscape, contemporary Islamic education faces unique challenges and opportunities. Higher education institutions in various parts of the world are competing to develop Islamic study programs that are relevant to the needs of the times and are able to produce graduates who not only master religious knowledge, but also have global competence. Comparative studies are an effective approach to understanding the diversity of Islamic education models and identifying best practices (Purnamasari et al., 2024). In this context, the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Seoul National University (SNU) attract attention as two leading universities in Asia that offer Islamic studies programs with distinctive characteristics. Through a comparative study of these two universities, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Islamic education can be adapted to different social, cultural and political contexts.

NUS and SNU, as representatives of two regions with different Muslim majority populations, namely Southeast Asia and Northeast Asia, have a unique approach in developing Islamic education (Kosim, 2024). On the one hand, NUS as a university in a multicultural country with a significant Muslim population, emphasizes the relevance of Islam to the values of pluralism and tolerance. (Tohari, 2022). On the other hand, SNU, as a university in a country with a Muslim minority, focuses more on strengthening Islamic identity and preserving Islamic scientific traditions (Putri et al., 2022). The differences and similarities in curriculum, teaching methods, and the contribution of the two universities in forming Muslim intellectuals will be the main focus in this discussion. Thus, the comparative study between NUS and SNU is expected to provide a valuable contribution to the development of Islamic education in the future, both at the national and global levels.

3.1. The Context of Islamic Education in Singapore and South Korea

Seoul National University (SNU) in South Korea dan National University of Singapore (NUS) in Singapura are wo leading universities in Asia that attract students from various countries (Student, 2024). Although neither is a religious-based university, many Muslim students study at these two institutions. As universities that support plurality and diversity, SNU and NUS strive to provide support for Muslim students in their religious practices (Colledge Humanities, 2024). On both campuses, there are active Muslim communities, both in the form of student organizations and through social and religious activities that are held regularly. Thus, Muslim students on both campuses can feel support in carrying out their religious obligations even though they are in a secular environment (Umayyatun, 2017).

At Seoul National University, Islamic education is not part of the formal curriculum, but this university opens opportunities for Muslim students to introduce Islam through social and academic activities (Paradays, 2022). Even though the Muslim community in South Korea is relatively small, SNU provides space for Muslim students to worship and hold religious events. There is a campus mosque managed by the local Muslim community and Muslim students around campus, which functions as a center for religious activities and a place of worship (Pratama, 2023). Through various events such as religious discussions, celebrations of Islamic holidays, and other social activities, Muslim students at SNU can share information about Islam with the wider campus community, providing a better understanding of Islam for other students (Paradays, 2022).

National University of Singapore has a fairly large and growing Muslim community because of Singapore's geographical location which is close to Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia (Kosim, 2024). At NUS, Muslim students are supported by active Islamic student organizations, such as the NUS Muslim Society (Ahmed, 2023). This organization is not only a forum for students to worship and discuss Islam, but also holds various religious and social activities involving students from various backgrounds. This makes NUS an inclusive environment for Muslim students to express their religious identity while contributing to building cross-cultural understanding among international students (Ahmed, 2023).

In terms of facilities, NUS and SNU strive to support the needs of Muslim students. At NUS, the campus provides several special prayer rooms for Muslim students at several points on campus, which allows them to carry out

prayers and other forms of worship more easily (National University of Singapore (NUS), 2023). Apart from that, this university also provides halal food in several campus cafeterias, so that Muslim students can follow a diet according to Islamic law. At SNU, although there are not as many halal food facilities as at NUS, there are efforts by the university to expand Muslim-friendly food options (Faridah & Sari, 2019). Students at SNU can also find halal restaurants around campus, which allows them to remain comfortable in observing Islamic food principles.

Islamic education in the context of SNU and NUS focuses more on supporting the community and developing interfaith understanding in a multicultural campus environment (Setiarini et al., 2022). Even though there are no special study programs related to Islam on these two campuses, various activities involving the Muslim community play a role in introducing Islamic values to students from different backgrounds. Reflecting sacred religious values is very important and valuable in academic life no matter how much it is in a multicultural campus environment for universal harmonization as global citizens (Sassi & Zahra, 2023).

Based on the explanation above, these two universities have shown how secular education can provide space for flexible religious practice. Secularity is understood as a step forward in encouraging the development of student religiosity and broader academic goals. Indeed, in reality, whatever entity tends to be carried out only through a secular approach in fulfilling oneself and the ummah will definitely fail. As creatures we cannot let go of theology, but not solely based on theological references, but rather navigating theology and the world as a whole (Sassi, 2024). Even through secular education with the above understanding, it also functions as a platform to strengthen tolerance and intercultural understanding (Zeng, 2024). This is in line with the goals of modern education which not only emphasizes academic aspects, but also builds character and strengthens social harmony in a diverse campus environment.

3.2. Analysis of Curriculum and Learning Materials in Singapore and South Korea

Seoul National University (SNU) has a curriculum renowned for its highly comprehensive approach and emphasis on research, covering a wide range of disciplines. The curriculum at SNU is designed to promote critical thinking, analytical skills, and research abilities at a high level (University, 2019). In the context of higher education in South Korea, SNU is one of the

most innovative universities in terms of adopting an interdisciplinary learning model, where students are encouraged to take courses from various departments (Zeng, 2024). This approach allows students to develop a more holistic and integrated perspective on complex problems in the world. In addition, the curriculum at SNU is frequently updated to adapt to the latest developments in science and technology, as well as to accommodate the needs of the dynamic job market.

The subject matter at SNU is also designed to be in-depth, which encourages students to have a strong understanding of the theory as well as the practical application of each subject. Every study program at SNU emphasizes research and analytical skills, so students are familiar with rigorous research methodology (Zeng, 2024). For example, in social sciences and humanities programs, students are provided with in-depth theoretical knowledge of contemporary social theory and philosophy, as well as equipped with research skills to conduct field research. Meanwhile, science and technology programs often offer advanced laboratories and internship opportunities, allowing students to be directly involved in cutting-edge research projects (University, 2019). It aims to provide a learning experience that is not only theoretical but also practice-oriented, which is considered important in preparing graduates for the world of work.

Apart from focusing on academic and technical competencies, the curriculum at SNU also focuses on developing character and ethical values among students. This is reflected in various value-based courses and student activities that prioritize social responsibility, leadership and cross-cultural understanding (Maryani et al., 2024). SNU encourages its students to not only focus on academic achievement but also contribute positively to society. In some study programs, there is a mandatory community service component, where students are expected to engage in service activities relevant to their field (Paradays, 2022). This approach creates a balanced educational experience between theory, practice, and character development, with the goal of producing graduates who have broad knowledge, professional skills, and strong ethics.

National University of Singapore (NUS) is known to have a dynamic and diverse curriculum, designed to answer the needs of higher education in the era of globalization. The curriculum at NUS emphasizes interdisciplinary learning, where students are given the opportunity to take courses outside their main field of study. With this option, NUS seeks to create graduates who are not only experts in one particular field, but also have a broader cross-

disciplinary understanding (Colledge Humanities, 2024). Students at NUS can choose from a variety of elective courses, from social sciences, arts, business to technology, allowing them to build a diverse set of skills. In addition, NUS has a "General Education" program that all students must take as part of the university's general curriculum (Syakrani et al., 2022). This program covers topics relevant to modern society, such as ethics, sustainability, and digital literacy, aiming to strengthen students' understanding of global issues and prepare them to face challenges in the world of work (Perwasiah, 2020).

The study materials at NUS are also designed to be in line with the latest developments in various fields. In social science faculties, for example, course materials are frequently updated to cover current topics, such as globalization, climate change, and social inequality (National University of Singapore (NUS), 2023). Likewise in computer science and engineering faculties, which teach the latest technology, such as artificial intelligence, big data, and the Internet of Things (IoT). NUS has a research-based approach, which means that most of the learning material is taken from the latest research results, both from NUS's own faculty and from international collaborations with well-known universities in the world (Lee & Win, 2004). In this case, students are invited to actively participate in the learning process, either through case studies, research projects, or internships in related industries. This approach aims to ensure that NUS graduates have an applicable practical understanding and are able to apply theory in real situations (Kristien, 2019).

In addition, analysis of the curriculum and course materials at NUS shows a strong focus on developing soft skills, such as communication, collaboration, and leadership skills (Wong et al., 2007). NUS realizes that technical skills alone are not enough to compete in the modern job market, so they emphasize the importance of interpersonal skills and adaptability in the world of work. Through group activities, class discussions, and project presentations, NUS students are given various opportunities to improve these skills. In addition, NUS also has various career development programs, including seminars, workshops and career guidance from industry professionals ("National University of Singapore (NUS)," 2023). All of this is part of the curriculum which aims to prepare students to become individuals who are not only competent in scientific fields, but also able to work well together in teams, think critically, and have high integrity.

3.3. Learning Method

Seoul National University (SNU) has a learning method designed to encourage students to be active and independent in exploring science (Zeng, 2024). At SNU, the teaching method is based on a student-centered learning approach, where the role of students is very central in the learning process. Lecturers function as facilitators who encourage students to think critically and find their own answers through exploration and discussion. Learning is carried out not only through lectures, but also through case studies, group discussions, and real problem solving. With this approach, students at SNU not only memorize theories, but they are encouraged to understand and apply them in practical situations, strengthening analytical and critical thinking skills that are highly valued in the academic and professional world (Jun, 2023).

The learning method at SNU also integrates technology as an important part of the teaching process. In various faculties, lecturers use advanced technological tools, such as e-learning, digital collaboration platforms, and computer simulations, which enable students to have a more interactive and dynamic learning experience (Cho et al., 2024). Apart from that, the blended learning method, which combines face-to-face teaching with online learning, is also often applied. This provides flexibility for students to access materials anytime and anywhere, as well as interact with lecturers and classmates through online forums. SNU also provides a complete online learning portal, where students can download course materials, submit assignments, and discuss with lecturers in flexible time. The use of this technology enriches students' learning experiences while improving their digital skills which are very necessary in the era of modern technology (Bansal & Quan, 2024).

Apart from technology-based methods and independent learning, SNU also emphasizes the importance of research and direct practice as part of learning methods (Zeng, 2024). Students are encouraged to get involved in research projects, internships, and collaboration programs with industry from an early age. In laboratory-based courses, students are given the opportunity to carry out direct experiments and understand the scientific principles they learn in real situations. In various fields of study, especially science and engineering, students are also involved in collaborative projects with senior researchers that enable them to actively participate in the process of discovery and innovation. In addition, there are many internship and industry collaboration programs that allow SNU students to experience real-world work experience, as well as apply their knowledge in a professional

environment (Jun, 2023). Through this approach, SNU not only equips students with academic knowledge, but also practical experience that is relevant to the needs of industry and society

Teaching and learning methods at National University of Singapore (NUS) prioritize an approach based on active student involvement, with an emphasis on problem-based learning (PBL) and interactive discussions (Lee & Win, 2004). This approach allows students to become more involved in the subject matter in a practical and contextual way. In this context, lecturers act more as facilitators who help students explore their understanding through case studies, group discussions, and application of theory in real situations. Students don't just sit and listen to lectures, but they are directly involved in the learning process by looking for solutions to the problems given. This method is very effective in developing critical thinking, analytical and problem solving skills which are much needed in the professional world (Mahat & Loh, 2024).

In addition to problem-based learning, NUS also implements research-based learning that connects students with ongoing research projects at the university. Students are given the opportunity to work directly with researchers in various fields, from science and technology to humanities and social sciences (Adilah et al., 2023). Through this experience, students not only gain theoretical knowledge, but also practical skills in conducting research, processing data, and compiling scientific reports. This research-based learning enriches students' learning experience in a more applicable way, enabling them to develop in-depth analytical skills, as well as forge links with industry and the wider academic world (Seow & Hussain, 2024).

On the other hand, NUS also utilizes technology to support teaching and learning methods. With complete digital learning facilities, such as e-learning platforms, students can access lecture materials, assignments and exams online, as well as interact with lecturers and fellow students through virtual discussion forums. The use of this technology makes it easier for students to study independently and flexibly, especially for those who have busy schedules or a preference for learning unconventionally (Mahat & Loh, 2024). Apart from that, NUS has also adopted a hybrid learning model, which combines face-to-face learning and online learning. This model allows for more flexible teaching, giving students the opportunity to learn according to their individual needs and learning styles, while maintaining the quality of interaction and involvement in the learning process (Seow & Hussain, 2024).

Comparative studies of NUS and SNU have provided valuable insights into the dynamics of contemporary Islamic education. The results of this research can be a reference for curriculum development, teaching methods, and international cooperation in the field of Islamic education. For the future, further research needs to be carried out to explore the potential for collaboration between universities in Indonesia and NUS and SNU, as well as other leading universities in the world.

4. Conclusion

A comparative study between the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Seoul National University (SNU) in the context of contemporary Islamic education provides a rich picture of how two leading institutions in Asia are responding to the challenges and opportunities of globalization. Even though NUS and SNU have different historical, social and cultural backgrounds, both universities demonstrate a strong commitment to developing relevant and quality Islamic studies programs. NUS Higher Education Institutions, with their inclusive and multicultural approach, have succeeded in integrating Islamic values with the context of Singapore's pluralistic society. Meanwhile, the SNU Higher Education Institution places more emphasis on strengthening Islamic identity and preserving Islamic scientific traditions. Overall, both NUS and SNU have succeeded in producing graduates who not only master religious knowledge, but also have global competence and are able to contribute to community development. This study concludes that contemporary Islamic education must be able to adapt to changing times without ignoring fundamental religious values. Apart from that, it is important for Islamic educational institutions to establish international cooperation to enrich insight and expand networks.

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