

# The Development of Islamic Boarding School-Based Higher Education System (*Ma'had 'Aly*) in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to analyse the understanding of policymakers about the Islamic boarding school-based education system (henceforth *Ma'had Aly*), its design of the development, and its typology as well as model of the development of private Islamic religious institution in North Sumatera. This research was done using a multisite qualitative-interactive research method. The data analysis used the theory initiated by Miles and Huberman, Taylor and Bogdan, McMillan, and Schumacher. The results of this study indicate that *first*, the understanding of policymakers of private Islamic religious college based on Islamic boarding schools (or *pesantren*) is very adequate at the conceptual and operational levels. This understanding is based on the experience and intellectualism of the leadership in managing the institution. *Second*, the development design of private Islamic religious college based on Islamic boarding schools is relatively the same, and it tends to adopt the design of *pesantren* colleges rather than colleges. *Third*, the typology or model of private Islamic religious colleges based on Islamic boarding schools in North Sumatera is relatively the same. The system built is based on the convergence design of *Salaf* and *Khalaf*, as Dofier mentioned.

**Keywords:** Education System, *Ma'had Aly*, North Sumatera, Typology.

## Introduction

Islamic boarding schools are unique, distinctive, indigenous, and highly developed educational institutions in Indonesia (1). It is recorded that until 2023, there were 36,600 Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, with 3.4 million active students and 370,000 *kiyai* (2). Recently, Islamic boarding schools have transformed by establishing higher education institutions that continue to develop along with the development of Islamic education. It is recorded that the beginning of Islamic boarding school-based universities was founded by the Darussalam Modern Islamic Boarding School Foundation under the name Darussalam Higher Education (*Pendidikan Tinggi Darussalam*) on 1 *Rajab* 1383/17 November 1963 by KH Ahmad Sahal, KH. Zaenuddin Fananie, KH. Imam Zarkasyi, which then transformed into Darussalam Education Institute (or *Institut Pendidikan Darussalam*), Darussalam Islamic Studies Institute (or *Institut Studi Islam Darussalam*), and finally converted into Darussalam Islamic University (*Universitas Islam Darussalam* or *UNIDA*), Gontor, Ponorogo (3). After the Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No.

71/2015 issuance, many Islamic boarding schools began to transform into *Ma'had aly*. The transformation of boarding schools into *Ma'had Aly* did not only occur on the island of Java as the lighthouse of the existence of boarding schools but also on several other islands in Indonesia, including the island of Sumatera, which is in North Sumatera. Several boarding schools develop *Ma'had aly* or organize *pesantren*-based educational institutions in North Sumatera, including the As-Sunnah Islamic College in Deli Serdang, *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah Medan*, and Al-Washliyah University Medan. Recorded before the establishment of the As-Sunnah Islamic High School (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam As-Sunnah henceforth STAI As-Sunnah) in 2002 was an Arabic language and Islamic science teaching institution known as *Ma'had 'Aly As-Sunnah*. In February 2012, *Ma'had aly As-Sunnah* officially became STAI by referring to the decree letter from Director General of Islamic Education Number: DJ.I/149/2012. In contrast, *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah Medan* was established and inaugurated on January 24, 2005, under the

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auspices of Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU). Meanwhile, Al-Washliyah University Medan was established on May 18, 1958. STAI As-sunnah and Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah Medan since its inception was indeed under the boarding school foundation, to be precise the Risalah Al-Islamiah Foundation and the Asia Muslim Foundation while Al-Washliyah University Medan since 2022 has implemented *Ma'had aly* Education system, more precisely higher education for ulama cadres. Therefore, the presence of the *Ma'had aly* education system in North Sumatra's Islamic religious universities is a measure of the success of Islamic education in North Sumatra. Therefore, this discourse is important to discover the style, typology, and design of the development of the education system based on the national standards of higher education (Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi or SN-DIKTI).

To situate the *Ma'had 'Aly* model within a broader global context, it is important to compare it with other prominent Islamic higher education systems such as Dars-e-Nizami in South Asia, Qom seminaries in Iran, and Al-Azhar University in Egypt. The Dars-e-Nizami curriculum, developed in the Indian subcontinent in the 18th century, emphasizes logic (*mantiq*), philosophy (*falsafah*), Arabic grammar, and classical Islamic sciences (4–7). It remains prevalent in Deobandi and Bareilvi seminaries across India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Unlike *Ma'had 'Aly*, which integrates with national higher education frameworks such as *Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia* (KKNI) and *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program, Dars-e-Nizami remains largely detached from state-accredited degree systems, limiting its graduates' formal academic mobility despite strong religious training. The Qom seminaries in Iran serve as the epicenter of Shi'a Islamic scholarship, emphasizing jurisprudence (*fiqh*), principles of jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*), and theological-political education. Qom's seminary system is tightly linked to the state and is instrumental in shaping Iran's political-religious elite (8,9). *Ma'had 'Aly*, by contrast, lacks such institutionalized political entrenchment, allowing for a broader diversity in interpretation and governance among institutions. Al-Azhar University, with its millennium-old legacy, offers a unique model that blends traditional Islamic learning with modern

disciplines across multiple faculties (10–12). Its comprehensive structure and global reputation have made it a central node in Sunni Islamic education. While *Ma'had 'Aly* shares Al-Azhar's dual focus on classical and contemporary subjects, it is relatively newer and still developing institutional credibility and international recognition. *Ma'had 'Aly* stands out for its attempt to harmonize pesantren-based education with national accreditation systems and its integration into the broader framework of Indonesian higher education (13–15). This positioning allows it to contribute not only to religious scholarship but also to the nation's educational and developmental goals. However, it still lags behind in global recognition and depth of tradition compared to older institutions like Al-Azhar or Qom.

There are not so many research results conducted by researchers related to the development of *Ma'had Aly* in North Sumatra. Until 2023, research on this topic centered on the Java island. In 2020, Mashudi conducted a study on the format of Islamic boarding school-based higher education institutions in terms of scientific structure and management (16). This research revealed findings that Islamic boarding school-based higher education institutions have distinctive characteristics in integrating science with various descriptions related to planning, implementation, and evaluation of the integration itself. In the context of management, recruitment of teaching staff is based on skills, qualifications, and ability to recite the al-quran. In higher education policy, the Chancellor has a high position but still builds communication with Islamic boarding school managers

In 2022, Maktumah conducted a study on the development of the curriculum of Islamic Boarding School Colleges (17). She offered findings that the curriculum of Islamic boarding school colleges is built with four models, namely: subject-centered design, learner-centered design, problems-centered design, and books-centered design. Collaboration in curriculum development uses the administrative and grassroots models with four orientations: transmission, transaction, transformation, and transcendence. Each of these findings has theoretical implications that are both developing and correcting the previous theory.

The research results presented in the description above clearly do not yet display a comprehensive

education system developed by Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*)-based higher education institutions. The research results above still partially submit findings related to curriculum design, institutional models, integration and management aspects, and Islamic boarding school-based higher education institutions are institutional patrons that can be relied on in obtaining religious knowledge for anyone. Therefore, the researcher's research offers a novelty that will comprehensively reveal the education system (objectives, curriculum, materials, methods, educators, students, facilities, tools, approaches) of *Ma'had aly* in North Sumatra. With different perspectives and typologies, the researcher believes that the results of this research contribute significantly to the development of higher education, not only in North Sumatra but also in Indonesia.

## Methodology

This study employed a multi-site qualitative-interactive design, which is appropriate for exploring how different *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions implement and interpret *pesantren*-based higher education. The use of multiple research sites allows for the identification of patterns and differences across institutions, which strengthens the validity of findings and enables typological categorization. The research locations were in STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang, *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah*, and Al-Washliyah University of Medan. The three sites chosen—Al-Washliyah University Medan, STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang, and *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah* Medan—were selected based on their representativeness of different theological orientations and institutional models (traditionalist, Salafi, and modernist). The data collection process at the qualitative study stage relied on in-depth interview techniques, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentation techniques. After obtaining data on the education system developed in each university, it was continued with a multi-site interaction study. The data analysis techniques will generally follow the data analysis techniques (18). The use of triangulation ensured data reliability. The voices of stakeholders across institutions provided not only descriptive data but also evaluative perspectives on *Ma'had 'Aly's* relevance and integration with national education policy.

## Result and Discussion

In general, the understanding of policy makers about *Ma'had Aly* developed by Al-Washliyah University Medan is very good. This is proven by the data and facts obtained that the narrative, curriculum guidebook containing the basis of policy, course structure, lecturers, students, facilities and so on are arranged in detail. When the researcher asked

Researcher: “bagaimana menurut bapak/ibu tentang sistem pendidikan berbasis *pesantren* (*Ma'had Aly*) yang dikembangkan oleh perguruan tinggi keagamaan islam swasta di Sumatera Utara? (What do you think about *Ma'had Aly* developed by private Islamic religious universities in North Sumatra?)”

MJ: Menurut saya dengan adanya pendidikan yang berbasis *pesantren* (*Ma'had Aly*) dapat menghasilkan alumni yang profesional dan proaktif terhadap peluang dan tantangan di zaman ini. Harapannya semoga menjadi ulama. (In my opinion, with the existence of *Ma'had Aly*, it can produce alumni who are professional and proactive towards the opportunities and challenges of this era. The hope is that they will become ulama.) Higher education based on ulama cadres is very much needed today, because currently there is very little higher education based on turats books.

With the same question, Vice Rector 1, MR, stated that *Ma'had Aly* is prominently needed, especially in North Sumatra. The community, which is generally still religious, especially in the regions, certainly dreams of the presence of Islamic boarding school-based higher education institutions. However, not all private Islamic religious universities have an Islamic boarding school-based education system. Likewise, *Ma'had Aly* developed by private Islamic religious universities in North Sumatra, especially Al-Washliyah University Medan, is already good and it fulfills great demand by the community. Therefore, the government must encourage and promote the implementation of this institution. Several educational institutions that I have met know that *Ma'had Aly* in North Sumatra is very good, the existence of this institution will be more intensive in improving the morals of the nation's children who, at the same time we are facing moral decadence.

The understanding of policymakers at Al-Washliyah University in Medan is very adequate regarding *Ma'had Aly* based education system. The facts show that the narrative curriculum guidebook, which contains basic policies, course structure, lecturers, students, facilities, etc., is arranged in detail. This study reveals that the narratives and curriculum guidebooks of *Ma'had aly* at Al-Washliyah University Medan are arranged systematically and in detail. This guidebook includes policy bases, vision and mission, and curriculum structures that are integrated with Islamic boarding school values. This guide is not only a reference for lecturers and students but also shows how policymakers have a deep understanding of the importance of Islamic boarding school-based education in tertiary institutions.

The course structure at *Ma'had aly* Al-Washliyah University Medan is designed holistically, combining traditional religious knowledge with modern knowledge (19–21). This proves that policymakers understand the need for integration between religious knowledge and the context of contemporary education. Courses are arranged based on levels and relevance, from the study of interpretation, hadith, and fiqh to disciplines supporting students' practical skills. According to researchers (20), the ideal Islamic education curriculum must integrate religious knowledge and general knowledge. Al-Washliyah University Medan applies this theory when compiling its curriculum, indicating a good understanding of policy.

The quality of lecturers at *Ma'had Aly* Al-Washliyah University Medan is a key factor in the success of this education system. Lecturers who teach are individuals who have a strong background in Islamic boarding school education and higher education. Policymakers have recruited educators who not only master academic materials but also have experience in the world of Islamic boarding schools. In the study of Islamic boarding school education (22), one of the most important elements of Islamic boarding school education is the role of the *kiai* or teacher. Al-Washliyah University Medan seems to have followed this principle by selecting lecturers competent in traditional Islamic education.

The facilities provided by Al-Washliyah University Medan to support Islamic boarding school-based

education are also very adequate. Dormitories, mosques, libraries, and study rooms are designed to support a conducive learning atmosphere for students to internalize Islamic boarding school values. Supporting facilities such as dormitories and mosques are essential elements in the Islamic boarding school-based education system (23). These facilities play an important role in building the character and spiritual habits of students, which is well accommodated by Al-Washliyah University Medan.

The policies implemented by Al-Washliyah University Medan show an effort to maintain the traditional values of Islamic boarding schools, such as discipline, *adab* or etiquette towards teachers, and moral development while remaining relevant to the demands of modern education. This is reflected in the interaction between lecturers and students who emphasize ethics and morality under Islamic boarding school values. The success of the Islamic education system is measured not only by academic aspects but also by character building (24). Al-Washliyah University Medan has emphasized this in their education policy, proving the policy makers' deep understanding.

Policymakers at STAI As-Sunnah have a very adequate understanding of *Ma'had Aly*. This is based on the fact that since its inception, this private Islamic religious college has adopted the *ma'had aly* system. STAI As-Sunnah established with a strong foundation in the *pesantren* education system which prioritizes in-depth Islamic religious studies. Since its inception, the institution has adopted the *ma'had aly* system as part of its identity and educational approach. This shows that the policymakers deeply understand the philosophy of traditional Islamic education integrated with higher education. As in the past, researchers mentioned (22), Islamic boarding schools play an important role in transmitting religious knowledge and character building. Adopting the *ma'had aly* system from the beginning, STAI As-Sunnah exemplifies how traditional Islamic education can be applied systematically in higher education. This also shows that they are aware of the importance of Islamic boarding school education in forming a generation of qualified scholars.

Policymakers at *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah* really understand the concept of *Ma'had Aly*. The argument is that most of the teaching staff are

*ma'had aly* alumni, and this private Islamic religious college is operated based on *pesantren* with superior programs of *I'dad lughawi*, *Hafiz Al-Qur'an*, and remote *da'i* cadres. One strong argument that shows the understanding of policymakers regarding *ma'had aly*-based education is that most of the teaching staff at this school are alumni of *Ma'had Aly*. This ensures that the teachers understand the concept of Islamic boarding school education and have undergone the educational process. Hence, they can transfer the experience and knowledge to the students. It is relevant to the statement that emphasizes the importance of the role of *kiai* or teachers in *pesantren* education (22), who are expected not only to master knowledge but also to become moral and ethical models for their students. Thus, policymakers at *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah* have chosen educators with the right background to carry out the vision of Islamic boarding school-based education.

The excellent programs offered by *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah*, such as *I'dad Lughawi* (language preparation), *Hafiz Al-Qur'an*, and Remote *Da'i* Cadre; reflect a deep understanding of the needs of Islamic education based on Islamic boarding school. The *I'dad Lughawi* program aims to strengthen students' Arabic language skills, which are key to studying classical Islamic literature. The *Hafiz Al-Qur'an* program emphasizes *Qur'an* memorization as one of the core values of Islamic boarding school education. Meanwhile, the cadre of remote *da'i* program aims to produce *da'i* who can preach in remote areas, which is also in line with the social mission of *pesantren* in spreading Islamic propagation.

The curriculum implemented at *Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah* also reflects a deep understanding of how Islamic boarding school education should run. The courses taught include the study of *tafsir*, *fiqh*, and *hadith*, as well as supporting sciences such as Arabic language and *Qur'anic* science. With this curriculum, students are not only equipped with religious knowledge but also trained to think critically and have the skills needed in the world of *da'wah* and teaching Islam.

### **The Design of Islamic Boarding School-Based Education System Development**

The development of *Ma'had 'Aly* as an Islamic higher education model in Indonesia is governed

by a distinct legislative and policy framework (13, 15, 25). The Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 71 of 2015 marked a formal turning point in the institutionalization of *Ma'had 'Aly*. It provides legal standing for *Ma'had 'Aly* as a higher education institution (HEI) distinct from conventional Islamic universities, aligning with traditional *pesantren*-based epistemologies while adhering to minimum standards of higher education quality.

National education policies, including the National Standards of Higher Education (SN-DIKTI) and the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), offer guidance on curriculum development, graduate competence, and learning outcomes. Institutions such as STAI As-Sunnah have integrated KKNI/MBKM into their systems while maintaining a strong *pesantren* character, enabling *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions to offer qualifications recognized by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Furthermore, *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions are subject to accreditation by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) or the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education (DIKTIS) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These bodies evaluate compliance with academic standards, infrastructure adequacy, and institutional governance. This requirement ensures that *Ma'had 'Aly* does not operate in isolation from national academic standards, thus promoting both traditional Islamic scholarship and modern academic accountability.

Despite these regulatory supports, challenges remain. The absence of a unified curriculum across *Ma'had 'Aly* institutions leads to variations in quality and identity. Additionally, the dual governance under both the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Religious Affairs sometimes causes overlap and ambiguity in implementation. Nevertheless, Indonesia's policy direction increasingly favors hybrid models that respect local Islamic traditions while ensuring academic rigor and national relevance. This hybrid approach distinguishes *Ma'had 'Aly* from traditional seminaries in other Muslim-majority countries and makes it an important model for integrating Islamic identity with national educational development.

The design developed by Al-Washliyah University Medan is the higher education for *ulama* cadres

with mastery of *Turats*, *Islamic Dirasah*, Memorizing the Qur'an, Hadith, and mastery of bilingualism as its flagship programs. One of the main elements in the design of ulama Cadre education at Al-Washliyah University is mastery of *turats* or classical Islamic intellectual heritage. *Turats* include books written by previous scholars in various Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and *kalam*. Through *turats* learning, students are taught to understand and study classical thoughts that are the basis for the development of Islamic sciences (26–28). The importance of the *turats* tradition in Islamic education is where students are educated to understand the works of previous ulama as part of efforts to maintain and develop Islamic knowledge. Al-Washliyah University, through this program, continues this tradition, ensuring that its graduate cadres of scholars are able to master the classical sciences as a foundation for solving contemporary Islamic problems.

The *Dirasah Islamiyah* program at Al-Washliyah University includes comprehensive religious studies, including *tafsir*, *hadith*, *fiqh*, *ushul fiqh*, and other supporting sciences. The design of this program emphasizes in-depth and critical Islamic studies, where students are not only invited to understand Islamic texts textually but also contextually in accordance with the challenges of the times. Memorizing the Qur'an and Hadith is one of the leading educational design programs at Al-Washliyah University. This program aims to produce a cadre of ulama who not only understand Islamic texts but are also able to memorize and teach the Qur'an and hadith to the community. This memorization is considered a strong foundation in the formation of scholars who are able to become guardians of Islamic knowledge. The importance of the tradition of memorization in Islamic education, especially in maintaining the authenticity and transmission of Islamic knowledge (29–31). Al-Washliyah University, focusing on memorizing the Qur'an and Hadith, ensures that its graduates have the competencies needed to maintain and continue the authentic tradition of Islamic knowledge.

Bilingual proficiency (Arabic and English) is one of the leading programs of PTKU at Al-Washliyah University, where students are trained to master both languages. Arabic is taught as a tool to understand classical Islamic literature. At the same time, English is mastered to open access to modern

academic literature and prepare cadres of scholars to play a role in the international arena. The importance of English proficiency for Muslim scholars in order to participate in global discourses on Islam and Muslim society (32–34). With a program design that emphasizes mastery of Arabic and English, Al-Washliyah University prepares a cadre of ulama who are not only competent in Islamic traditions but also ready to compete and contribute on the international stage.

STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang runs a *ma'had*-based higher education institution with scientific integration between KKNi/MBKM and *ma'had* curriculum, memorizing the 7 juz of the Qur'an, mastering Arabic, sharia science, and da'i cadreship. STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang adopted the KKNi and MBKM as part of its higher education. KKNi serves as the national standard for higher education qualifications in Indonesia. At the same time, MBKM allows students to study outside their main study program, including conducting community service and teaching in the field. On the other hand, the *ma'had* curriculum implemented by STAI As-Sunnah maintains the tradition of Islamic boarding school education, with a focus on religious knowledge and character building based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. One of the biggest challenges in integrating Islamic boarding school-based education with KKNi and MBKM is balancing meeting national standards and maintaining the uniqueness of Islamic boarding school education that emphasizes religious knowledge (35–37). STAI As-Sunnah has succeeded in integrating these two frameworks while still prioritizing in-depth religious learning through the *Ma'had Aly* curriculum, without neglecting the national qualifications set by the government.

One of the important aspects of the curriculum at STAI As-Sunnah is the Quran memorization program, where students are expected to memorize at least 7 juz of the Quran during their studies. This program is an integral part of the *Ma'had Aly* based education and reflects the importance of maintaining the purity of the Quran text as the primary source of Islamic teachings.

Arabic language proficiency is one of the main focuses at STAI As-Sunnah. Arabic is taught not only as a means of communication but also as a means to understand classical Islamic literature or *turats*, including the Qur'an, hadith, and books of *tafsir*, *fiqh*, and *ushul fiqh*. Students are trained to

read, write, and speak Arabic, which are vital skills for an ulama or *da'i*. Arabic language proficiency is the foundation of religious education in Islamic boarding schools (38–40). Without this ability, access to primary Islamic sources will be very limited. Therefore, teaching Arabic at STAI As-Sunnah is an important step in equipping students with the skills needed to study and teach Islamic sciences.

The *sharia* science program at STAI As-Sunnah focuses on teaching Islamic law (*fiqh*), interpretation, *hadith*, and other related sciences that are the basis of Islamic teachings. This program is designed to produce graduates who are competent in applying and teaching *sharia* science to the community while also being able to respond to contemporary issues with a strong *sharia* basis. At STAI As-Sunnah, the teaching of *sharia* science ensures that students not only get theory but also the practical application of Islamic laws in everyday life.

The *da'i* cadre program at STAI As-Sunnah aims to prepare students to become religious leaders (*da'i*) who can preach in society. This cadre formation involves not only mastery of religious knowledge but also mental, spiritual, and social development. Students are trained to understand the challenges of preaching in the modern era and are given practical skills to communicate Islamic messages to diverse audiences. Modern preaching requires a more inclusive approach, where *da'i* must be able to adjust *da'wah* methods and materials according to the social and cultural conditions of the community. The *da'i* cadre program at STAI As-Sunnah shows a deep understanding of the importance of preparing graduates who not only master religious knowledge but also have the communication and leadership skills needed to carry out *da'wah* tasks in contemporary society.

Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah runs the *I'dad lughawi* program and Islamic studies with an integrated bachelor's degree system with UMSU and the Al-Ulum Islamic Economics and Business College (STEBIS Al-Ulum.) The *I'dad Lughawi* program, run by Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah, focuses on intensive Arabic language teaching for students. This program is designed to provide a strong foundation in *nahwu* (grammar) and *sharaf* (morphology), which are very important for those who will continue their studies in the field of Islamic sciences. Mastery of Arabic is

an important key to understanding religious texts such as the Qur'an, *hadith*, and classical books in Islamic literature (31, 41–43). The *I'dad lughawi* run by Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah is very much in line with this tradition, ensuring that students have adequate linguistic skills to access Islamic primary sources.

In addition to language programs, Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah also offers an Islamic study program integrated with the formal education system at UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum. This program covers various Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh*, *tafsir*, *hadith*, and *ushul* sciences (the basics of Islamic law). Students who take this program can obtain a formally recognized bachelor's degree while also intensively studying Islamic education through the *pesantren* curriculum. Integrating traditional Islamic education in *pesantren* with the formal education system in universities is one of the innovations in modern Islamic education (44–46). This allows students to gain two benefits: expertise in Islamic sciences through a traditional approach, as well as academic qualifications recognized at the national level. At Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah, this integration takes place through collaboration with UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum, which provides an opportunity for students to earn an academic degree while remaining involved in *ma'had aly*-based religious learning.

The collaboration between Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah with UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum allows *Ma'had aly* students to attend formal lectures at both universities. This collaboration provides students with access to broader academic resources, such as libraries, laboratories, and other higher education facilities, while ensuring that graduates have relevant skills to play a role in the wider community. The integration program run by Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah offers a double advantage: the formation of ulama who study religious knowledge and professionals who have formal academic qualifications. Students who graduate from this program have solid competence in *sharia* knowledge but also have abilities that are recognized in the professional world, both in the context of education, preaching, and other sectors. Graduates of this program are projected to have holistic competencies, both in Islamic and professional fields. With a strong command of Arabic through *I'dad Lughawi*, they are able to access classical Islamic literature. In addition,

collaboration with UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum allows them to have the academic and managerial skills needed in the modern world. The integrated program run by Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah seeks to answer this challenge by combining the traditional Islamic boarding school approach with a more structured formal education, thus producing graduates who are ready to face the modern world without losing their Islamic foundations.

The curriculum at Ma'had 'Aly institutions in North Sumatra are intentionally structured to balance classical Islamic scholarship with competencies relevant to modern Indonesian society. Religious preparation is achieved through intensive study of *turats* (classical texts), memorization of the Qur'an and Hadith, and training in Arabic literacy. This ensures graduates are competent in religious sciences, enabling them to serve as *ulama*, *da'i*, and Islamic educators in both formal and informal settings.

At the same time, curricular components such as bilingual education (Arabic and English), Islamic economics, public speaking, community development, and digital literacy serve to broaden professional horizons. Graduates from institutions like Al-Washliyah University and Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah are often equipped to work not only in religious institutions but also in government bodies, media, education sectors, NGOs, and Islamic financial institutions. Furthermore, the incorporation of MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) policies — such as internships, community projects, and teaching assistantships — gives students experiential learning opportunities. This aligns with KKNI standards, which emphasize applied skills, leadership, and adaptability. By integrating values-based learning with practical competencies, the Ma'had 'Aly curriculum fosters ethical, socially engaged professionals who are capable of navigating Indonesia's multicultural and democratic society while maintaining Islamic ethical commitments.

### **Typology and Model of Islamic Boarding School-Based Education System Development**

One of the distinguishing features of Ma'had 'Aly institutions in Indonesia are their ability to navigate theologically diverse Islamic traditions through a combination of curricular design and

institutional identity. The typology or model used by Al-Washliyah University Medan tends towards convergence between the *salaf* and *khalaf* curriculum with the standards of scholars in the Al-Washliyah tradition based on *turats*. Al-Washliyah University Medan develops an education system that combines the *salaf* and *khalaf* curriculum in an effort to maintain a balance between traditional education based on yellow books and a modern educational approach. The *salaf* curriculum at this university refers to the heritage of classical Islamic knowledge, known as *turats*, while the *khalaf* curriculum includes modern disciplines taught with a contemporary approach. Thus, graduates are expected to be able to understand classical Islamic literature and be ready to face the challenges of the modern world. Researchers (22) explained that the *salaf* curriculum focuses on teaching yellow books (*turats*), which include various Islamic disciplines such as interpretation, *hadith*, *fiqh*, and *tasawuf*. On the other hand, the *khalaf* curriculum adopts a modern approach, which includes scientific methods and more systematic teaching of general sciences. The convergence model applied by Al-Washliyah University harmonizes the two approaches, providing space for students to master traditional and modern sciences simultaneously.

One of the characteristics of education at Al-Washliyah University Medan is its commitment to the standards of *ulama* that have long been held by the Al-Washliyah tradition. This standard emphasizes the importance of *turats* as the main source of education. *Turats* is a term that refers to classical Islamic scientific literature that includes various branches of science, ranging from interpretation and *hadith* to *fiqh* and *kalam* (26, 28). Through the teaching of *turats*, Al-Washliyah University aims to produce *ulama* who are not only proficient in religious knowledge but also have a deep understanding of the methodology of previous *ulama* in compiling Islamic law and thought. Al-Washliyah University Medan, as one of the leading Islamic higher education institutions in North Sumatra, places *turats* as an important part of the curriculum, in line with the Al-Washliyah tradition, which since its inception has focused on teaching yellow books.

STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang implements the typology of private Islamic religious colleges with an integrated system while still prioritizing the



*manhaj salaf al-shalih*. It implements an integrated system between the Private Islamic Religious Higher Education (PTKIS) curriculum and the *Salaf* method-based curriculum. This system combines national university standards with a traditional Islamic boarding school education approach that adheres to the principles of *Salaf al-Salih*. The formal curriculum recognized by the Ministry of Religion (based on KKNi and MBKM) is integrated with Islamic boarding school-based education that emphasizes the teaching of the Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic law such as *fiqh*, *aqidah*, and *morals*. *Salaf* method focuses on a pure understanding of Islam in accordance with what was practiced by the early generations of Muslims (47). By integrating the *manhaj salaf* into higher education, STAI As-Sunnah not only educates students to understand Islam academically but also provides a strong foundation of faith in accordance with the teachings of the *Salaf*.

The *Manhaj Salaf al-Salih* is the main foundation of teaching at STAI As-Sunnah. This methodology includes a literal approach to the Qur'an and hadith, as well as a rejection of innovation in religion (*bid'ah*). Apart from that, *Manhaj Salaf* also encourages mastery of Islamic knowledge which comes directly from classical books (*turats*), by maintaining strict teaching methods in understanding religious texts. STAI As-Sunnah emphasizes the importance of returning to the Qur'an and hadith as the main sources without interpretations that deviate from the teachings of the Prophet and his companions. This institution ensures that every educational component refers to the principles of *manhaj salaf*, thereby producing graduates who truly understand the importance of purifying *aqidah* in Islam.

Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah operates the integration of cooperative class science with the type of *Islamic studies oriented* in ma'had and *Islamic sciences oriented* in UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum. Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah focuses education in *ma'had aly* on Islamic Studies, which means this education is oriented towards classical Islamic studies. The educational materials delivered include basic Islamic studies such as the Qur'an, hadith, *fiqh*, tauhid, and other sharia sciences. The teaching system in Ma'had emphasizes the importance of a deep textual understanding of classical books (*turats*), which

have been the foundation of Islamic education for centuries.

The system of integration of knowledge operated by Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah is a holistic typology that combines Islamic Studies and Islamic Sciences within the framework of Islamic education. This typology allows students to obtain two types of complementary education: traditional education based on the teaching of classical Islamic texts, as well as modern education that introduces more contextual concepts of Islamic science, such as Islamic economics and Islamic business. Azyumardi Azra (1994) stated that the biggest challenge of Islamic education today is how to combine classical education with modern demands. The system implemented by Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah through cooperation with modern higher education institutions such as UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum is a real solution in integrating the two approaches. Students who study at the school not only study religious knowledge in the traditional way but are also equipped with modern sciences that are in accordance with the development of the times.

## Conclusion

Based on the description in the section on research results and discussion, several conclusions can be drawn: *First*, the understanding of policymakers in private Islamic religious colleges in North Sumatra is very adequate regarding *Ma'had Aly*. Facts show that the narrative, curriculum guidebook containing the basis of policy, course structure, lecturers, students, facilities, and so on is arranged in detail. Policymakers at STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang have a very adequate understanding on *Ma'had Aly* system. This is because this private Islamic religious college has adopted *Ma'had Aly* system since its inception. Policymakers at Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah really understand *Ma'had Aly*-based education system. The argument is that most of the teaching staff are *Ma'had Aly* alumni, and this private Islamic religious college is operated based on pesantren with superior programs of *I'dad lughawi*, Hafiz Al-Qur'an, and remote *da'i* cadres.

Second, the design developed by Al-Washliyah University Medan is Higher Education for Ulama Cadres with mastery of *turats*, *dirasah Islamiyah*, memorizing the Qur'an, Hadith, and bilingual mastery as its flagship program. STAI As-Sunnah

Deli Serdang runs a *ma'had aly*-based college with scientific integration between KKNI/MBKM and *ma'had* curriculum, memorizing the 7 juz Al-Qur'an, mastering Arabic, *shar'i* science, and *da'i* cadre. Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah runs the *I'dad lughawi* program and Islamic studies with an integrated undergraduate system with UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum.

Third, the typology or model used by Al-Washliyah University Medan tends to converge between the salaf and khalaf curriculum with the standards of scholarship in the turrat-based Al-Washliyah tradition. Meanwhile, STAI As-Sunnah Deli Serdang runs the typology of private Islamic religious colleges with an integration system while prioritizing the *manhaj salaf al-shalih*. Ma'had Abu Ubaidah bin Al-Jarrah operates scientific integration of cooperation classes with the type of Islamic studies oriented at *Ma'had Aly* and Islamic sciences oriented at UMSU and STEBIS Al-Ulum.

Based on the above conclusions, the researchers provide several recommendations for future consideration, which are *first*, the leaders of *pesantren*-based private Islamic religious colleges, should make their institutions a best practice in all aspects, especially for policymakers of Islamic boarding school-based colleges in North Sumatra in the development and management of higher education. *Second*, the leaders of Islamic boarding school-based private Islamic religious colleges should make the institutions they lead compile a frame of reference in designing and developing an Islamic boarding school-based higher education system, especially in the institutions they lead. *Third*, the leaders of private Islamic religious universities based on Islamic boarding schools should make the institutions they lead have a reference in choosing a typology or design for developing Islamic boarding school-based universities.

## Abbreviation

None.

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## Author Contributions

Zaini Dahlan: conceptualized framework, supervised the overall direction of the study, particularly the historical and philosophical aspects of the Ma'had 'Aly system, Salminawati: data collection, literature review, drafting the initial manuscript sections, Muhammad Yusuf: refined the research design, conducted the analysis, finalized the manuscript for submission. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

## Ethics Approval

All procedures related to data collection, including interviews and documentation were conducted in accordance with ethical standards. Prior informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

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