



Islamic Education Policy and the Birth of Model Madrasahs: An Analysis of the Transformation Policy of MAN Insan Cendekia in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of MAN Insan Cendekia is part of the dynamics of Islamic education policy in Indonesia, which seeks to integrate Islamic values with science and technology. This institution originated from an idea by B.J. Habibie through the Science and Technology Equity Program (STEP) in 1999, which was later transferred to the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This study aims to analyze the MAN Insan Cendekia transformation policy in the context of Islamic education policy, including its background, implementation, and implications for the madrasah education system. This study uses a literature review method by examining policy documents and analyzing related scientific literature. The results of the study show that this policy strengthens governance, integrative curriculum, and research-based learning systems at MAN Insan Cendekia, even though its implementation faces obstacles such as limited resources, the readiness of educators, and quality gaps between model madrasahs. Overall, the MAN Insan Cendekia transformation policy shows a new direction in Islamic education policy that emphasizes modernization without abandoning religious values. The sustainability of this policy requires increased human resource capacity, infrastructure support, and collaboration between institutions to strengthen the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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Introduction

Islamic education policy in Indonesia has been an important part of social and national policy since the colonial era until the reform era. The role of Islamic education is not only to transfer religious values, but also to serve as a forum for shaping national identity and a means of preparing the younger generation to face the tide of globalization (Hidayat et al., 2018). Throughout its journey, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has continued to strive to integrate Islamic education with the national education system, a process that often sparks debates between preserving tradition and embracing modernity (Luthfiyani & Sirozi, 2023).

Madrasahs, as Islamic educational institutions, play a very important role in the Indonesian education system (Annisa et al., 2024). From small madrasahs in remote villages to modern institutions with international standards, madrasahs have developed into places of learning that combine religious teachings with general knowledge. However, there are still various challenges such as disparities in teaching quality, limited facilities and infrastructure, and a gap in quality with

public schools, so innovative steps are needed to strengthen the madrasah education system in the future (Taufik, 2017) .

One effort to address these challenges is the emergence of the "model madrasah" concept, which is the idea of establishing leading madrasahs that are able to compete with the best educational institutions at the global level (Mohsen et al., 2023) . Model madrasahs are designed to combine Islamic values with modern learning methods, the use of technology, and the mastery of 21st-century skills. The emergence of this concept indicates a more progressive direction in Islamic education policy, where madrasahs are no longer viewed as standalone institutions but as an important part of an open and inclusive national education system (Munawaroh & Syamsul Aripin, 2025) .

MAN Insan Cendekia is a concrete example of the implementation of the model madrasah concept that has been in the spotlight. This institution was established as part of the education transformation policy initiated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Located in Gorontalo, among other places, this madrasah has undergone a major transformation from a conventional educational institution to a boarding school with an integrated curriculum. This transformation is based on a grand vision to produce a generation that is not only excellent in religious understanding but also has strong abilities in science, technology, and leadership (Munawaroh & Syamsul Aripin, 2025) .

The transformation of MAN Insan Cendekia was carried out through various strategic and planned steps, such as the development of an integrated curriculum, improvement of teacher competence, and the construction of modern educational facilities that support the learning process (Sukarno, 2014) . This policy is not only oriented towards improving students' academic achievement, but also seeks to respond to the community's demands for Islamic education that is in line with the developments of the modern era. Thus, MAN Insan Cendekia can be said to be a forum for experimentation and innovation for the development of a more advanced Islamic education model in Indonesia (Sukarno, 2014) .

The impact of this transformation policy is clearly evident in the increased reputation of MAN Insan Cendekia, both nationally and internationally, as well as its role in shaping students' character to be honest, creative, and innovative (Munawaroh & Syamsul Aripin, 2025) . However, this process of change also raises a number of important questions regarding the sustainability of the program, challenges in its implementation in the field, and the possibility of resistance from those who still adhere to the traditional Islamic education model. Therefore, an in-depth analysis is needed to examine how Islamic education policy can be a driver of positive transformation without eliminating the Islamic values that are the main spirit of this education.

This article aims to examine the transformation policy of MAN Insan Cendekia as a case study in the context of Islamic education policy, highlighting important aspects such as the background of the policy, the implementation process, and its impact on the future of madrasahs in Indonesia. Through an analytical approach, this paper seeks to explore how model madrasahs such as MAN Insan Cendekia can serve as concrete examples for broader Islamic education reform. In addition, this article also seeks to identify valuable lessons that can be used as a reference in formulating national education policies in the future.

Method

This study uses *library research* to examine the transformation policy of MAN Insan Cendekia within the framework of Islamic education policy in Indonesia. Library research is a data collection method conducted by examining and studying various theories sourced from literature

relevant to the research topic (Fadli, 2021) . This approach was chosen because it provides an opportunity to collect data and examine various data and ideas sourced from written literature (Milya Sari. Asmendri, 2020) , such as scientific articles, official reports from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, national education policies, and research results on model madrasah development.

Results

The Insan Cendekia State Senior High School (MAN) is the result of a government policy that aims to integrate religious knowledge with general knowledge into a single integrated education system. This institution is designed as a model of excellence for madrasahs that are able to combine Islamic values with a balanced mastery of science and technology. To date, MAN Insan Cendekia has grown rapidly with a total of 23 madrasahs spread across various provinces in Indonesia. For clarity, the author presents the following table containing a list of MAN Insan Cendekia spread across various provinces:

Table 1.1: List of MAN Insan Cendekia

No	Name of MAN Insan Cendekia	Province
1	MAN Insan Cendekia Serpong	Banten
2	MAN Insan Cendekia Gorontalo	Gorontalo
3	MAN Insan Cendekia Jambi	Jambi
4	MAN Insan Cendekia East Aceh	Aceh
5	MAN Insan Cendekia Ogan Komering Ilir	South Sumatra
6	MAN Insan Cendekia Siak	Riau
7	MAN Insan Cendekia Paser	East Kalimantan
8	MAN Insan Cendekia Pekalongan	Central Java
9	MAN Insan Cendekia Central Bangka	Bangka Belitung Islands
10	MAN Insan Cendekia Padang Pariaman	West Sumatra
11	MAN Insan Cendekia Central Bengkulu	Bengkulu
12	MAN Insan Cendekia Batam City	Riau Islands
13	MAN Insan Cendekia Tanah Laut	South Kalimantan
14	MAN Insan Cendekia Sambas	West Kalimantan
15	MAN Insan Cendekia Kendari City	Southeast Sulawesi
16	MAN Insan Cendekia Palu City	Central Sulawesi
17	MAN Insan Cendekia Sorong	West Papua
18	MAN Insan Cendekia South Tapanuli	North Sumatra
19	MAN Insan Cendekia East Lombok	West Nusa Tenggara
20	MAN Insan Cendekia West Halmahera	North Maluku
21	MAN Insan Cendekia Gowa	South Sulawesi
22	MAN Insan Cendekia Pasuruan	East Java
23	MAN Insan Cendekia East Lampung	Lampung

To provide an in-depth understanding of the MAN Insan Cendekia transformation policy, the author collected various data related to the policy that emerged alongside the establishment of the MAN Insan Cendekia model madrasah, with the following results:

Table 1.2: Chronology of Policies and Regulations related to MAN Insan Cendekia in Indonesia

Year	Type of Regulation/Document	No. and Source	Main Content/Substance of Policy	Impact on MAN IC and Islamic Education
1996	Decree of the Head of BPPT	Decree of the Head of BPPT in 1996	Establishment of Insan Cendekia High Schools in Serpong and Gorontalo as leading schools based on science and Islamic values	The beginning of MAN IC and a symbol of synergy between science and religion
1998	Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs (KMA)	KMA No. 490 of 1998	Management of Insan Cendekia High School transferred from BPPT to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and name changed to MAN Insan Cendekia	MAN IC officially became part of the national madrasah system under the Ministry of Religious Affairs
2017	Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation (PMA)	PMA No. 42 of 2017	Determination of the organization and work procedures of MAN Insan Cendekia, MAN Keagamaan, and MAN special programs	Serves as the legal basis for the structural management of model madrasahs under the Ministry of Religious Affairs
2017	Decision of the Director General of Islamic Education (Kepdirjen Pendis)	Kepdirjen Pendis No. 486 of 2017	Guidelines for the implementation of the MAN Insan Cendekia program, including the national selection system, integrated curriculum, and dormitory management	Standardizing the operations of MAN IC and strengthening its function as a research madrasah
2019	Decision of the Minister of Religion (KMA)	KMA No. 183 and 184 of 2019	Establishment of the PAI and Arabic curriculum and guidelines for its implementation in madrasahs	Integrating the religious curriculum with modern science based on <i>a scientific learning approach</i>
2020	Ministry of Religious Affairs Strategic Plan	Ministry of Religion Strategic Plan 2020-2024	Replication of the MAN IC program throughout Indonesia as a	Equal access to quality Islamic education and strengthening

2022	Decision of the Minister of Religion	KMA No. 1171 of 2022	model for national flagship madrasahs Establishment of the National Selection Mechanism for New Students (SNPDB) for MAN IC and leading madrasahs	modern madrasahs in the regions Realizing a student selection system based on national achievement and meritocracy
2022	Decision of the Minister of Religion (KMA)	KMA No. 347 of 2022	Implementation of the independent curriculum in madrasahs, including MAN IC as a pilot project	MAN IC becomes an example of a project-based and research-based independent curriculum
2024	Decision of the Minister of Religion (KMA)	KMA No. 450 of 2024	Strengthening the implementation of the independent curriculum and adaptive learning model at MAC IC	Promoting innovation in digital learning at leading madrasahs

Based on the various regulations outlined above, it can be understood that the establishment and development of MAN Insan Cendekia is not only a technical policy in the field of education, but also part of the government's grand strategy in national Islamic education policy. This series of policies reflects the continuity of the vision that has been initiated since the era of B. J. Habibie to the present, namely to make madrasahs modern educational institutions based on Islamic values, scientifically oriented, and able to compete at the global level.

Discussion

Background to the Establishment of MAN Insan Cendekia

The establishment of the Insan Cendekia State Islamic High School (MAN) cannot be separated from the context of Islamic education policy in Indonesia in the 1990s. During this period, the government was focused on developing human resources who were not only excellent in science and technology (IPTEK), but also had a strong moral and spiritual foundation. This idea emerged as a response to the national education system at that time, which still separated general education from religious education (Nazifa et al., 2025). Therefore, there was a need for an Islamic educational institution model that could integrate both aspects in a balanced and comprehensive manner.

In addition, the development policy for Insan Cendekia State Islamic High Schools (MAN) was formulated as an effort by the state to address fundamental issues that have long been associated with madrasahs in the national education system. One of these issues relates to the position and acceptance of madrasah graduates, who in practice are still not fully regarded as equal to graduates of public schools. Although madrasah diplomas are legally recognized, the reality on the ground shows that many madrasah graduates still face limited opportunities, both in continuing their education to a higher level and in entering the world of work. In addition, madrasahs are often perceived as less formal educational institutions that do not fully reflect the modernity of the

education system, so that public confidence in their quality is not yet optimal. This situation highlights the gap between the regulatory recognition given by the state and the social reality experienced by madrasah graduates (Mariana et al., 2022) .

In addition to the issue of graduate recognition, the challenges faced by madrasahs are also closely related to the content and implementation of the learning process. Until now, the learning structure in madrasahs has tended to place religious subjects as the main focus, while efforts to integrate science and technology have not been fully developed. This condition has implications for the readiness of students to face the demands of 21st-century competencies, which emphasize mastery of science, technology, and critical thinking skills. In addition, the quality of madrasah education is also influenced by the qualifications and competencies of teachers, particularly in their mastery of modern pedagogical approaches and integrative learning. A number of studies show that learning practices in madrasahs are still dominated by conventional patterns and are not yet fully adaptive to the dynamics of global education. Based on these conditions, the government then formulated the MAN Insan Cendekia policy as a model for leading madrasahs that are expected to improve the quality, image, and competitiveness of madrasahs through management reform, strengthening of the integrative curriculum, and improving the quality of teaching staff (Mariana et al., 2022) .

The initial idea for the establishment of Insan Cendekia was rooted in the vision of Prof. B. J. Habibie when he served as Head of the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology (BPPT). In 1996, through the Science and Technology Equity Program (STEP), Habibie came up with the idea of establishing a boarding school-based elite school that integrates intellectual intelligence with the power of faith and piety. From this idea, the Insan Cendekia Senior High School (SMU) was born, which later became the forerunner of the Insan Cendekia State Islamic High School (MAN). Habibie believed that a nation's technological progress would only be meaningful if it was balanced with the moral and spiritual maturity of its future generations (Munawaroh & Syamsul Aripin, 2025) .

Over time, management of the school was transferred from BPPT to the Ministry of Religious Affairs (now known as the Ministry of Religious Affairs) in the early 2000s. This transition was a turning point in the history of Insan Cendekia, as it officially became the Insan Cendekia State Madrasah Aliyah (MAN IC). This transformation reflected the government's seriousness in developing madrasahs as an integral part of a modern, adaptive, and high-quality national education system. MAN IC was then positioned as a model madrasah that integrates science with Islamic values, while also serving as a laboratory for Islamic education policy oriented towards research, innovation, and academic excellence (Mastiyah & Lisyawati, 2022) .

The establishment of MAN Insan Cendekia is also a response to the challenges of the times. Conventional madrasahs have often been perceived as lagging behind in academics and scientific knowledge, despite their strength in shaping spiritual and moral values(Djaed, 2023) . Through MAN IC, the government is striving to present a new face of Islamic education, namely an institution that not only produces students who are knowledgeable in religion, but also intelligent in science and excellent in character. By implementing a *boarding school* system, an integrated curriculum, and research-based learning methods, MAN IC is designed to produce a generation that is "smart and righteous," in line with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' vision of developing Indonesians who are knowledgeable and have noble character (Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia Number 42 of 2017, 2017) .

Institutional Reform and Education Governance

The issuance of Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 42 of 2017 concerning the Organization and Work Procedures of Insan Cendekia State Senior High School () is an important

foundation in strengthening the governance system and organizational structure of MAN Insan Cendekia. This regulation details the division of managerial functions, starting from the head of the madrasah, the deputy heads in the fields of academics, student affairs, boarding school affairs, public relations, to the management of facilities and infrastructure. Not only that, this regulation also establishes the existence of various supporting units, such as libraries, laboratories, entrepreneurship units, and quality assurance institutions that play a role in maintaining the quality of education delivery (Regulation of the Minister of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia Number 42 of 2017, 2017) .

From a human resources perspective, the recruitment process for teachers and educational staff at MAN Insan Cendekia (MAN IC) is carried out through a highly selective and measurable mechanism. Based on the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education Number 486 of 2017 concerning Guidelines for Implementing the MAN Insan Cendekia Program, the recruitment of educators is carried out nationally by assessing various aspects of competence, including academic, professional, pedagogical, and the ability to integrate Islamic values with science and technology. This selection process includes portfolio review, in-depth interviews, and teaching ability tests based on research and technological innovation.

Meanwhile, the student recruitment system at MAN Insan Cendekia is regulated nationally through the National Selection of New Students (SNPDB), which is based on academic achievement and scientific potential. This mechanism is regulated in the Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs (KMA) No. 1171 of 2022, which emphasizes the principles of meritocracy, fairness, and transparency in student admission. The selection process is conducted in two stages: administrative and academic selection (computer-based tests and report card scores), as well as interviews and character assessments. Prospective students with superior academic abilities, high integrity, and commitment to Islamic values have a greater chance of being accepted (KMA No. 1171 of 2022). This selection pattern reflects the orientation of MAN IC as a research madrasah that seeks to prepare Muslim scientists who are spiritually, intellectually, and socially superior.

From a management perspective, this policy reflects a concrete step toward the professionalization of madrasah management. The organizational structure outlined in PMA 42/2017 allows for a more balanced division of tasks, focused coordination between units, and a transparent and accountable reporting and evaluation system. In line with the findings of Mastiyah and Lisyawati, the implementation of modern management at MAN IC Pekalongan is considered to be effective thanks to the support of participatory leadership and a work culture that is open to innovation. This condition illustrates that the application of good governance principles in madrasahs contributes directly to improving the efficiency and quality of Islamic education as a whole (Mastiyah & Lisyawati, 2022) .

Development of an Integrative Curriculum and Research-Based Learning

The curriculum implemented at MAN Insan Cendekia is designed with the aim of balancing and complementing religious and general knowledge. Its implementation is based on KMA Number 183 of 2019 concerning the Islamic Education and Arabic Language Curriculum and KMA Number 184 of 2019, which contains guidelines for its implementation (KMA No. 184 of 2019 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of KMA No. 183 of 2019, 2019) (. These two policies reinforce the integrative curriculum model that is characteristic of MAN IC. According to Syaifuddin, the curriculum structure at MAN IC adopts a thematic and integrative approach, where religious learning is linked to a broader scientific and academic context so that students understand spiritual values from a scientific and rational perspective (Syaifuddin, 2021) .

More than just theoretical learning, MAN IC also emphasizes research-based education and direct experience. Students are encouraged to actively engage in simple research, scientific

discussions, and collaborative projects that foster curiosity and critical thinking skills. The results of research by Sun, Huda, and Yani show that academic activities such as scientific writing at MAN IC play an important role in training students' analytical skills while strengthening their understanding of Islamic values. Thus, the curriculum policy at MAN IC is not only oriented towards mastery of knowledge but also towards the formation of scientific thinking skills and balanced religious character (Riwanda et al., 2024).

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Educational Innovation

The latest policies through KMA Number 347 of 2022 and KMA Number 450 of 2024 place MAN Insan Cendekia as one of the pilot madrasahs in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Through this policy, the learning process is directed towards a project-based and research-based approach to develop students' creativity, critical thinking skills, and digital literacy. Based on data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2024), MAN IC was chosen as the initial model because it was considered to have the human resources, infrastructure, and learning systems that were in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Decree of the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia No. 347 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Madrasahs, 2022).

In terms of implementation, the application of this curriculum opens up space for strengthening a more dynamic and contextual academic culture. Students are given the opportunity to learn more independently, collaboratively, and in a manner that is relevant to real-life challenges. However, the results of research by Munawaroh and Aripin show that the implementation of this policy in several new MAN ICs still faces a number of obstacles, particularly related to the readiness of teaching staff and limited supporting facilities. Therefore, the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN ICs does not only depend on the regulations that have been established, but also on the ability of madrasah management to optimize resources and ensure continuous support from various parties (Munawaroh & Syamsul Aripin, 2025).

Policy Implications for Islamic Education Policy

Overall, various policies related to MAN Insan Cendekia reflect the government's serious efforts to transform Islamic education in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. Starting from the transfer of management from BPPT to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the formation of a more professional organizational structure, to the implementation of an integrated curriculum that combines religious values with modern science, all of these show a consistent policy direction towards the modernization of Islamic education. This step is evidence of the continuity of Islamic education policy that focuses on the integration of faith, knowledge, and technological advancement into a unified national education system (et al., 2024).

However, the implementation of this policy still faces several challenges. Some of these include quality gaps between model madrasahs, limitations in human resources and infrastructure, and the need for continuous training for teachers and educational personnel. Therefore, the future development of MAN Insan Cendekia needs to be accompanied by more focused strategies, such as increasing human resource capacity, strengthening the evaluation and quality assurance system, and sustainable cross-sector cooperation. With these steps, this policy is expected to not only produce leading madrasahs but also promote the advancement of national Islamic education that is adaptive, inclusive, and globally competitive (Ismail et al., 2023).

Conclusion

The transformation of the Insan Cendekia State Madrasah Aliyah (MAN) is clear evidence of the new direction of Islamic education policy in Indonesia, which seeks to integrate modern scientific advances with Islamic values. Since it was first conceived by B. J. Habibie and is now under the management of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, MAN Insan Cendekia has succeeded in becoming a model madrasah that unites spiritual, intellectual, and technological dimensions in a harmonious and integrated education system.

Various strategic policies, such as PMA No. 42 of 2017, KMA No. 183 and 184 of 2019, and KMA No. 347 and 450 of 2024, demonstrate the government's continued focus on strengthening governance, curriculum, and learning innovation in madrasahs. These policies are not only oriented towards academic achievement, but also aim to build a professional, adaptive, and globally competitive Islamic education system. Through the implementation of an integrative curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, MAN Insan Cendekia positions itself as a pioneer of Islamic education that is able to balance scientific mastery with the formation of the religious character of its students.

However, this transformation process still faces a number of obstacles, such as limited human resources, quality gaps between model madrasahs, and uneven educational infrastructure support. Therefore, the sustainability of MAN Insan Cendekia's development requires more comprehensive strategic measures, including improving the capacity of teachers and educational personnel, strengthening the quality assurance system, and continuous collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and the community.

Overall, the existence of MAN Insan Cendekia shows that modernizing Islamic education doesn't mean leaving religious values behind, but rather confirming that faith and knowledge can go hand in hand in an effective and character-building education system. With its commitment to innovation and consistent governance, MAN Insan Cendekia has the potential to become a national model for leading research madrasahs capable of producing a generation of Muslims who are intelligent, moral, and ready to face global challenges in a civilized manner.

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