

Incremental Policy in the Development of Madrasahs and Islamic Boarding Schools: A Review of Lindblom's Incrementalism Theory in the Contemporary Era

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ABSTRAK

The development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia has increasingly required policy approaches capable of balancing educational modernization with the preservation of Islamic traditions. However, limited studies have examined this development from the perspective of Charles E. Lindblom's incrementalism theory. This study aimed to analyze how incremental policy characterizes the contemporary development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools and to identify the factors influencing the incremental policy process within these Islamic educational institutions. The research employed a qualitative library research design using official government policy documents, scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and other relevant academic publications as primary data sources. Data were analyzed through qualitative content analysis involving data reduction, thematic categorization, interpretation, and source triangulation. The findings reveal that the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools consistently follows an incremental policy trajectory characterized by gradual improvements in educational regulations, curriculum and learning systems, teacher professional development, institutional governance, and educational financing. The study also demonstrates that institutional leadership, organizational capacity, government support, educational decentralization, socio-cultural values, political commitment, bureaucratic coordination, digital transformation, and globalization collectively influence the continuity of incremental policy development. These findings confirm the continued relevance of Lindblom's incrementalism theory in explaining policy change within Islamic education and suggest that gradual policy adaptation provides an effective mechanism for maintaining institutional stability while encouraging sustainable educational innovation. The study contributes to both public policy and Islamic education literature by offering a comprehensive conceptual understanding of incremental policy development in contemporary Islamic educational institutions.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: July 15, 2026

Revised: July 27, 2026

Approved: July 29, 2026

Published: July 31, 2026

Keyword:

Incremental policymaking; Islamic education policy; Madrasahs; Islamic boarding schools; Lindblom's incrementalism.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational policy has become an increasingly strategic instrument for improving the quality, equity, and sustainability of educational systems in response to rapid social, political, technological, and economic transformations. Within public policy studies, one of the most influential perspectives for explaining how policy evolves is incrementalism, introduced by Charles E. Lindblom. Rather than viewing policymaking as a fully rational and comprehensive process,

incrementalism argues that public policies generally emerge through successive limited comparisons, in which policymakers make small, sequential adjustments to existing policies instead of implementing comprehensive reforms (Lindblom, 1959). Lindblom described this process as *muddling through*, emphasizing that policymakers operate under conditions of limited information, bounded rationality, political compromise, and institutional constraints. Consequently, incremental policy change is regarded as a more realistic and practical approach because it minimizes policy failure, accommodates diverse stakeholder interests, and enables governments to adapt continuously to changing circumstances (Lindblom, 1979). This perspective has become particularly relevant for understanding educational policy in developing countries, where institutional diversity and socio-cultural complexity often require gradual rather than radical reform.

The Indonesian education system provides an important context for examining incremental policymaking, particularly in the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). As two major institutions of Islamic education, madrasahs and *pesantren* have historically played a dual role in preserving Islamic scholarship while simultaneously responding to national educational reforms. Unlike many public educational institutions that have undergone structural reforms through centralized policy interventions, the transformation of madrasahs and *pesantren* has generally evolved through gradual institutional adaptation. Curriculum revisions, teacher professional development, institutional governance reforms, infrastructure improvement, and the expansion of educational access have been implemented progressively rather than through abrupt systemic restructuring (Azra, 2019; Hasbullah, 2018; Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). Such gradual policy development reflects not only fiscal and administrative considerations but also the necessity of preserving the religious, cultural, and social legitimacy of Islamic educational institutions while responding to modernization and globalization.

From the perspective of public policy theory, this gradual pattern strongly reflects the principles of incrementalism. Lindblom (1959) argued that incremental policy change is generally more effective than comprehensive reform because policymakers continuously evaluate previous decisions before introducing subsequent improvements. Likewise, the concept of successive limited comparisons explains that policy decisions are rarely made independently; instead, each policy adjustment builds upon prior experiences and accumulated institutional learning (Lindblom, 1979). This perspective has subsequently been reinforced within contemporary public policy scholarship, which emphasizes that effective policy implementation depends not only on policy formulation but also on continuous policy learning throughout the implementation process (Dunn, 2018). Furthermore, successful policy implementation is shaped by complex interactions among governmental actors, institutions, available resources, and policy environments, making gradual adaptation one of the most realistic approaches for achieving sustainable policy outcomes (Howlett et al., 2020).

The gradual development of Islamic educational institutions has also been documented in recent empirical studies. Research by Afista and Abu Bakar (2021) demonstrates that the development of *pesantren*-based madrasahs requires adaptive and sustainable policy strategies capable of responding to contemporary social changes without undermining Islamic identity. Their study further argues that madrasahs integrated with Islamic boarding school systems possess greater potential to become high-quality educational institutions when supported by continuous managerial reform and quality-oriented institutional improvement (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2021). In addition, modernization within Islamic education should balance institutional innovation with the preservation of Islamic values to maintain social legitimacy during educational transformation

(Afista & Abu Bakar, 2021). These findings indicate that sustainable institutional development cannot be achieved through radical policy shifts alone but requires continuous organizational adaptation.

Recent studies concerning educational decentralization provide further evidence supporting the importance of gradual policy implementation. Mustabsyirah and Yuspiani (2025) argue that decentralization policies create opportunities for madrasahs to innovate according to local educational needs while simultaneously generating disparities in funding allocation, governance quality, and institutional capacity across regions. They further emphasize that effective implementation of educational policies requires stronger coordination between central and local governments to ensure equitable educational quality throughout Indonesia (Mustabsyirah & Yuspiani, 2025). Their empirical findings also reveal that gradual institutional development enables madrasahs to adjust more effectively to regulatory changes and societal demands, thereby strengthening organizational resilience and improving policy implementation (Mustabsyirah & Yuspiani, 2025). Collectively, these studies reinforce the argument that incremental policy approaches provide greater institutional flexibility than immediate structural reforms.

Previous studies have also highlighted significant transformations in the development of Islamic educational institutions. Zahari (2023) found that institutional transformation within pesantren has evolved gradually as an adaptive response to social change while preserving their traditional educational foundations. Similarly, Nashrullah (2022) reported that the modernization of pesantren education has primarily been achieved through selective curriculum integration implemented in incremental stages rather than through comprehensive institutional restructuring. Using an explicit incremental policy perspective, Indriani and Fauzi (2024) concluded that gradual policy approaches provide broader adaptive capacity for modern pesantren characterized by diverse institutional structures and organizational cultures. Although these studies contribute valuable empirical insights into Islamic educational development, they predominantly emphasize policy outcomes, institutional performance, or educational modernization rather than examining how incremental policy processes are formulated, negotiated, and implemented over time.

Despite the extensive application of Lindblom's incrementalism in public policy research, its use as an analytical framework for understanding the policy development of Indonesian madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools remains relatively limited (Dunn, 2018; Lindblom, 1979). Existing studies generally focus on educational management, curriculum reform, decentralization, governance, leadership, or institutional performance, while the mechanisms through which gradual policy change occurs have received considerably less scholarly attention. Consequently, there remains a significant research gap concerning the processes, institutional dynamics, and contextual factors that shape incremental policy development within contemporary Islamic education in Indonesia.

This study addresses this gap by applying Lindblom's theory of incrementalism as the primary analytical framework for examining policy development in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools during the contemporary era. Unlike previous studies that primarily evaluate policy outcomes, this research investigates the processes, mechanisms, and determinants of gradual policy change. The novelty of this study therefore lies in integrating classical incremental policy theory with contemporary Islamic educational policy to explain how policy evolution occurs within religious educational institutions characterized by institutional diversity, socio-cultural complexity, and continuous adaptation.

Accordingly, this study seeks to answer two research questions: (1) How does incremental policy characterize the contemporary development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in

Indonesia? (2) What factors influence the process of incremental policy development within these Islamic educational institutions? By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute theoretically to the growing literature on incremental policymaking in Islamic education while providing practical insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and pesantren leaders in designing adaptive, sustainable, and context-sensitive educational policies. Ultimately, this research is expected to enrich contemporary discussions on public policy implementation by demonstrating that the sustainable development of Islamic educational institutions is achieved not through radical transformation but through continuous, evidence-based, and institutionally responsive incremental change.

METHODS

1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research as its primary research design. This approach was selected because the study aimed to examine the incremental policy development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools through a systematic review and interpretation of existing written sources rather than collecting empirical data directly from the field. Library research enables researchers to investigate social phenomena by critically analyzing scientific literature, policy documents, legislation, and other documentary sources relevant to the research objectives. As emphasized by Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon through the interpretation of multiple sources of evidence. Similarly, Zed (2018) explained that library research focuses on collecting, organizing, and critically analyzing documented information to construct comprehensive academic arguments.

Within this study, Lindblom's theory of incrementalism served as the primary analytical framework for interpreting how educational policies concerning madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools have evolved through gradual and continuous policy adjustments. Accordingly, the study did not attempt to examine causal relationships but rather to interpret patterns of policy change and the contextual factors influencing incremental educational policy development.

2. Data Sources

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data consisted of official government policy documents related to the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools, including laws, government regulations, ministerial regulations, strategic plans, and policy documents issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. These documents were examined to identify policy directions, institutional reforms, and patterns of gradual policy development.

Secondary data were obtained from peer-reviewed national and international journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, research reports, and other scholarly publications discussing incrementalism, public policy, educational governance, and Islamic education. Literature was identified through major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Crossref, DOAJ, and Garuda. The selected references met three criteria: relevance to the research topic, academic credibility, and publication recency. According to Snyder (2019), a structured literature review requires transparent source selection and systematic evaluation to ensure the reliability and comprehensiveness of research findings.

3. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through a systematic document review. The researcher first identified policy documents and academic publications relevant to the development of madrasahs, Islamic boarding schools, and Lindblom's incrementalism theory. Subsequently, all selected documents

were classified according to their relevance to the research objectives before being examined critically to identify recurring themes, policy patterns, and institutional developments.

Document analysis has been recognized as a rigorous qualitative data collection technique because documentary evidence provides contextual information that supports comprehensive interpretation of policy processes (Bowen, 2009). Furthermore, systematic document review enhances transparency and allows researchers to synthesize evidence from multiple authoritative sources in a structured manner (Snyder, 2019).

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. This analytical technique was employed to identify, categorize, compare, and interpret meanings contained within policy documents and scholarly literature concerning the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools. Content analysis allows researchers to generate systematic and replicable interpretations from textual data while maintaining analytical rigor (Krippendorff, 2019).

The analysis followed the qualitative data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consisted of three stages. The first stage involved data reduction, during which relevant documents and literature were selected, organized, and classified according to the research focus. The second stage involved data display, in which the findings were organized into thematic categories based on the principal dimensions of Lindblom's incrementalism theory, including educational funding, curriculum development, human resources, and institutional governance. Finally, the conclusion drawing and verification stage was conducted by interpreting the identified policy patterns and explaining the factors influencing incremental policy development within the framework of contemporary Islamic education.

5. Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from government policy documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and other scholarly publications. This procedure was intended to ensure consistency among different sources while minimizing interpretative bias. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that triangulation is one of the principal techniques for establishing credibility in qualitative research because it enables researchers to verify findings through multiple sources of evidence. Likewise, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasized that credibility is strengthened when researchers integrate various forms of documentary evidence to support their interpretations.

RESULTS

1. Incremental Policy Characterizing the Contemporary Development of Madrasahs and Islamic Boarding Schools in Indonesia

The analysis revealed that the contemporary development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia was predominantly characterized by an incremental policy pattern, in which educational reforms were implemented through gradual adjustments rather than comprehensive structural transformation. Examination of government policy documents, strategic plans, and previous scholarly literature demonstrated that policy changes consistently evolved through continuous refinement of existing regulations, institutional arrangements, and educational practices. This gradual pattern reflects Lindblom's concept of *successive limited comparisons*, whereby new policies are formulated based on the evaluation and modification of previous policies instead of replacing them entirely (Lindblom, 1959, 1979). Such a policy trajectory has enabled Islamic educational institutions to maintain institutional stability while continuously responding to emerging educational, social, and technological challenges.

a. Gradual Development of Educational Policy

The findings indicated that educational policy concerning madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools evolved through a sequence of gradual regulatory improvements. Rather than introducing radical reforms, the government continuously revised existing educational regulations to strengthen institutional governance, improve quality assurance, and respond to changing educational needs. Policy development was consistently aligned with long-term national educational objectives while preserving the distinctive characteristics of Islamic educational institutions. Furthermore, governance reforms were implemented progressively through improvements in administrative management, institutional accountability, accreditation systems, and educational supervision. The continuity of these policies across successive governmental administrations demonstrated a sustained commitment to strengthening Islamic education through adaptive and evolutionary policymaking rather than politically driven policy shifts (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). These findings are also consistent with studies reporting that educational policy effectiveness is enhanced through continuous policy learning and institutional adaptation instead of comprehensive policy replacement (Dunn, 2018; Howlett et al., 2020).

b. Incremental Development of Curriculum and Learning

Curriculum development likewise exhibited a clear incremental pattern. The analysis showed that curriculum reform was conducted through periodic evaluation, limited implementation, revision, and wider institutional adoption. Curriculum adjustments consistently balanced the integration of Islamic values with contemporary educational competencies, allowing madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools to maintain their religious identity while responding to national curriculum reforms. The findings further revealed the gradual incorporation of digital learning technologies, online instructional platforms, and innovative pedagogical approaches to improve educational quality without disrupting established learning traditions. Consequently, curriculum reform represented a continuous process of educational improvement rather than a fundamental transformation of the existing educational system (Hasbullah, 2018). This finding corresponds with previous research demonstrating that modernization within Islamic educational institutions requires adaptive policy strategies that preserve institutional identity while encouraging educational innovation (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2021).

c. Incremental Improvement of Human Resources

Another important finding concerned the gradual enhancement of educational human resources. Professional development for teachers, *ustadz*, and educational personnel was implemented through continuous training, professional education, competency workshops, certification programs, and mentoring activities organized according to institutional readiness and national priorities. The phased expansion of teacher certification programs enabled educational institutions to strengthen instructional quality without generating significant organizational disruption. The findings suggest that competency improvement was viewed as a continuous developmental process rather than a one-time policy intervention. This gradual strategy supported sustainable improvements in instructional professionalism while strengthening institutional capacity across diverse Islamic educational settings (Azra, 2019). Similar findings have been reported by Mustabsyirah and Yuspiani (2025), who emphasized that sustainable educational quality requires continuous coordination between governmental authorities and educational institutions in implementing professional development policies.

d. Incremental Institutional Development

Institutional strengthening also reflected the characteristics of incremental policymaking. The findings demonstrated progressive legal recognition of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools

through successive regulatory improvements culminating in the enactment of Law Number 18 of 2019 concerning Islamic Boarding Schools, which significantly strengthened the institutional position of pesantren within Indonesia's national education system. Simultaneously, governance reforms were introduced incrementally through the enhancement of accreditation systems, institutional management, quality assurance mechanisms, and organizational accountability. Improvements in educational facilities and infrastructure were likewise implemented gradually according to institutional priorities and available governmental resources, allowing educational institutions to expand their capacity without disrupting organizational stability. These findings indicate that institutional development was achieved through cumulative policy refinement rather than comprehensive structural restructuring (Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

e. Incremental Financial Policy

Financial policy represented another significant dimension of incremental educational development. The findings showed that governmental financial support for madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools increased progressively through phased budget allocations, operational assistance schemes, infrastructure development programs, and institutional capacity-building initiatives. Financial assistance expanded gradually according to national fiscal priorities and institutional needs, enabling educational institutions to improve governance, infrastructure, and educational services in a sustainable manner. Rather than implementing large-scale funding reforms within a single policy cycle, financial support was distributed through continuous policy adjustments that maintained institutional stability while encouraging long-term organizational development (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020). These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that gradual financial support provides greater institutional flexibility and enables Islamic educational institutions to adapt more effectively to regulatory and societal changes (Mustabsyirah & Yuspiani, 2025).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the contemporary development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia has consistently followed an incremental policy trajectory across five interrelated dimensions, namely educational policy, curriculum and learning, human resource development, institutional strengthening, and financial policy. Collectively, these dimensions illustrate that sustainable development within Islamic educational institutions has been achieved through continuous policy refinement, institutional adaptation, and gradual capacity building, thereby reflecting the fundamental characteristics of Lindblom's incremental policy model.

2. Factors Influencing the Process of Incremental Policy Development within Madrasahs and Islamic Boarding Schools

The analysis identified five interrelated categories of factors that influenced the implementation of incremental policy development within madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. These factors comprised internal institutional conditions, external policy environments, socio-cultural dynamics, political and administrative contexts, and contemporary educational challenges. Collectively, these findings indicate that incremental policy development was shaped by the interaction between institutional capacity and the broader policy ecosystem in which Islamic educational institutions operate.

a. Internal Institutional Factors

The findings demonstrated that institutional vision and leadership constituted fundamental drivers of incremental policy development. Educational institutions possessing clear strategic visions and adaptive leadership were more capable of implementing gradual policy adjustments while maintaining organizational stability. Leadership commitment facilitated continuous

organizational learning, encouraged stakeholder participation, and strengthened institutional responsiveness to educational reform.

The analysis further revealed that organizational capacity and governance significantly influenced the effectiveness of policy implementation. Institutions with well-established governance structures, transparent administrative systems, and effective quality assurance mechanisms demonstrated greater readiness to adopt incremental reforms. In addition, human resource readiness emerged as a critical factor supporting policy continuity. Madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools with qualified teachers, educational personnel, and institutional managers were better positioned to implement successive policy improvements through continuous professional development and organizational capacity building (Azra, 2019; Afista & Abu Bakar, 2021).

b. External Policy Factors

External policy conditions also played an essential role in shaping incremental educational development. The findings showed that national educational regulations provided the principal legal framework guiding institutional development, curriculum improvement, governance reform, and quality assurance. Continuous refinement of educational regulations enabled Islamic educational institutions to adjust gradually to evolving national education priorities while maintaining institutional consistency (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020).

Government support through educational funding, infrastructure development programs, teacher professional development, and institutional assistance further strengthened the implementation of incremental policies. Moreover, educational decentralization expanded institutional opportunities to respond to local educational needs while simultaneously requiring stronger coordination between central and regional governments. The analysis indicated that decentralization encouraged policy flexibility but also highlighted disparities in institutional capacity across regions, thereby reinforcing the importance of gradual policy implementation (Mustabsyirah & Yuspiani, 2025).

c. Socio-Cultural Factors

Socio-cultural conditions were found to be another influential determinant of incremental policy development. The findings revealed that the preservation of Islamic traditions and religious values remained a primary consideration in every stage of educational policy adjustment. Consequently, institutional reforms were consistently designed to strengthen educational quality without diminishing the historical identity and religious character of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools.

Community participation and stakeholder engagement also contributed substantially to policy implementation. Parents, religious leaders, local communities, and educational foundations actively supported institutional development by participating in educational planning, resource mobilization, and policy implementation. Furthermore, local cultural adaptation enabled educational institutions to align national educational policies with regional socio-cultural characteristics, thereby increasing institutional acceptance and implementation effectiveness (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2021).

d. Political and Administrative Factors

Political and administrative environments likewise influenced the continuity of incremental educational policies. The findings indicated that sustained political commitment toward Islamic education contributed to the gradual expansion of policy support, institutional recognition, and educational financing. Successive governmental administrations generally maintained policy continuity by refining existing regulations rather than introducing entirely new policy frameworks.

Effective bureaucratic coordination among the Ministry of Religious Affairs, regional governments, educational authorities, and institutional administrators further facilitated policy implementation. The findings showed that coordination among these stakeholders promoted consistency in educational governance, reduced policy fragmentation, and strengthened institutional adaptation throughout successive policy cycles. Consequently, administrative continuity became an important factor supporting long-term educational development within Indonesia's Islamic education system.

e. Contemporary Challenges

The analysis further identified several contemporary challenges influencing the implementation of incremental policy development. Digital transformation emerged as one of the most significant challenges requiring educational institutions to gradually integrate digital technologies into teaching, learning, and institutional management. Rather than replacing conventional educational practices, digital innovation was incorporated progressively according to institutional readiness and available technological resources.

Globalization also increased demands for higher educational quality, international competitiveness, and graduate competencies while simultaneously encouraging institutional modernization. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that educational institutions consistently sought to balance innovation with the preservation of their Islamic educational identity. This balance was reflected in gradual curriculum adjustment, selective adoption of educational technologies, and continuous strengthening of religious values within institutional governance. These findings suggest that contemporary policy development was characterized by adaptive institutional responses that simultaneously pursued educational modernization and the preservation of Islamic educational traditions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that incremental policy development within madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools was influenced by a multidimensional interaction among institutional, governmental, socio-cultural, political, and contemporary contextual factors. These interconnected factors collectively shaped the capacity of Islamic educational institutions to implement sustainable policy adjustments while maintaining organizational stability and educational continuity.

DISCUSSION

1. Results Analysis

a Incremental Educational Policy, Curriculum, and Human Resource Development

The first research question sought to examine how incremental policy characterizes the contemporary development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that educational development has predominantly followed an incremental policy trajectory, whereby reforms have been implemented through continuous adjustments rather than comprehensive structural transformation. This pattern reflects Lindblom's concept of *successive limited comparisons*, in which policy decisions evolve through the gradual refinement of previous policies based on practical evaluation rather than through radical policy replacement. Such an approach has enabled Islamic educational institutions to preserve organizational stability while progressively responding to changing educational, social, and technological demands.

From a policy perspective, the gradual improvement of educational governance indicates that incremental policymaking functions as a mechanism for strengthening institutional quality without generating excessive administrative disruption. The continuous revision of educational regulations, governance systems, and quality assurance mechanisms demonstrates that policy learning has become an integral component of Islamic educational reform. Rather than pursuing ideal but difficult-to-implement reforms, policymakers have adopted adaptive strategies that

prioritize institutional continuity and gradual improvement. This interpretation supports Lindblom's (1979) argument that incremental policymaking provides a more realistic decision-making framework under conditions of limited information and complex policy environments. Likewise, Dunn (2018) emphasized that policy effectiveness depends not only on policy formulation but also on continuous learning during implementation, while Howlett et al. (2020) argued that sustainable public policy emerges through adaptive institutional learning and iterative policy adjustment.

The findings also reveal that curriculum development and human resource improvement have followed similar incremental patterns. Curriculum reform has been undertaken through successive evaluation, limited implementation, revision, and broader institutional adoption, allowing Islamic educational institutions to integrate contemporary competencies while preserving their religious identity. Simultaneously, professional development for teachers, *ustadz*, and educational personnel has been implemented through continuous certification, competency enhancement, and professional training programs organized according to institutional readiness. These findings suggest that educational quality improvement is viewed as a cumulative and sustainable process rather than an isolated policy intervention. Such evidence is consistent with previous studies indicating that modernization within Islamic educational institutions requires a careful balance between educational innovation and the preservation of Islamic values (Afista & Abu Bakar, 2021). Similarly, Azra (2019) argued that sustainable Islamic educational reform should integrate modernization with the continuity of religious traditions, while Hasbullah (2018) maintained that curriculum reform in Islamic education has historically progressed through gradual adaptation rather than abrupt institutional transformation.

b Factors Influencing Incremental Policy Development

The second research question addressed the factors influencing the implementation of incremental policy development within madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools. The findings indicate that incremental policymaking is not determined by a single variable but results from the interaction of institutional, governmental, socio-cultural, political, and contemporary contextual factors that collectively shape educational policy implementation. These multidimensional influences explain why policy development has progressed gradually while maintaining institutional continuity and organizational resilience.

Internally, institutional leadership, organizational governance, and human resource readiness emerged as fundamental determinants of successful policy implementation. Institutions possessing strategic leadership, transparent governance structures, and qualified educational personnel demonstrated greater capacity to implement continuous policy improvement. These findings suggest that organizational readiness functions as the primary enabling condition for incremental reform because institutional adaptation depends on the ability of educational organizations to internalize policy changes progressively. This interpretation aligns with Azra's (2019) view that institutional capacity represents a critical foundation for the sustainable development of Islamic education. Likewise, Afista and Abu Bakar (2021) argued that adaptive leadership and institutional management strengthen the ability of madrasahs to respond to educational reform while preserving their distinctive Islamic identity.

Externally, the findings demonstrate that national educational regulations, governmental financial support, decentralization policies, socio-cultural values, political commitment, and contemporary challenges substantially influence incremental policy implementation. Government regulations provide legal certainty for institutional development, whereas gradual financial assistance, decentralization, and stakeholder participation facilitate institutional adaptation

according to local needs. At the same time, digital transformation and globalization require Islamic educational institutions to modernize educational practices without compromising their religious traditions. These findings reinforce Dunn's (2018) argument that public policy implementation is shaped by continuous interaction between policy actors and institutional environments. Furthermore, Howlett et al. (2020) emphasized that policy sustainability depends on the coordination of political institutions, administrative systems, and available resources, while Mustabsyirah and Yuspiani (2025) demonstrated that effective decentralization policies require continuous collaboration between central and regional governments to reduce disparities in the quality of madrasah education. Collectively, these findings indicate that incremental policy development within Islamic educational institutions represents an adaptive governance strategy that simultaneously accommodates institutional diversity, policy continuity, and contemporary educational transformation.

2. Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study generally corroborate previous research concerning the development of Islamic educational institutions while providing a more comprehensive explanation of the policy processes underlying institutional transformation. Earlier studies have primarily emphasized the outcomes of educational reform, whereas the present study demonstrates that the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools is fundamentally characterized by an incremental policy process involving continuous policy refinement, institutional adaptation, and gradual capacity building across multiple dimensions.

The findings are consistent with those of Afista and Abu Bakar (2021), who argued that the modernization of madrasah education should balance educational innovation with the preservation of Islamic identity. Similarly, the present study found that curriculum reform, institutional governance, and human resource development were implemented progressively to ensure that educational modernization did not undermine the religious values and cultural traditions embedded within madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools. Both studies therefore suggest that sustainable educational development depends upon adaptive policy strategies rather than comprehensive institutional restructuring.

This study also supports the findings of Mustabsyirah and Yuspiani (2025), who reported that educational decentralization provides greater institutional flexibility while simultaneously creating disparities in governance capacity and educational quality across regions. The present findings extend this argument by demonstrating that gradual policy implementation serves as an adaptive mechanism through which Islamic educational institutions accommodate regional diversity, institutional readiness, and governmental policy priorities. Consequently, incremental policymaking not only facilitates policy implementation but also strengthens institutional resilience in diverse educational contexts.

Furthermore, the findings reinforce Lindblom's (1959, 1979) incrementalism theory and are consistent with Dunn's (2018) concept of policy learning as well as Howlett et al.'s (2020) framework of adaptive public policy. While these theoretical perspectives explain incremental policymaking within general public administration, this study contributes a more specific application by demonstrating how incrementalism operates within the governance of Islamic educational institutions. The evidence indicates that policy development in madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools is shaped by continuous interaction among educational regulations, institutional capacity, socio-cultural values, political commitment, and contemporary challenges. Accordingly, this study extends the application of incrementalism beyond conventional public policy analysis by

providing an integrated conceptual explanation of sustainable policy development in Islamic education within the contemporary Indonesian context.

3. Implications of the Findings

The findings provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the study of Islamic educational policy. Theoretically, this study extends the application of Lindblom's incrementalism theory by demonstrating that the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools is best understood as a continuous process of policy adaptation rather than a sequence of comprehensive reforms. The study also enriches the literature on Islamic education by integrating public policy theory with the governance of religious educational institutions, thereby offering a conceptual framework for explaining gradual institutional transformation in complex socio-cultural environments.

Practically, the findings suggest that policymakers should maintain the strengths of incremental policymaking while incorporating strategic innovation to address contemporary educational challenges. Continuous policy evaluation, stakeholder participation, adaptive institutional governance, and sustainable investment in curriculum, human resources, and educational infrastructure are essential for strengthening the long-term competitiveness of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools. This balanced approach enables Islamic educational institutions to preserve their religious identity while responding effectively to technological advancement, globalization, and evolving educational demands.

4. Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the research employed a qualitative library research design based exclusively on policy documents, scholarly literature, and official publications, without incorporating empirical evidence from field observations or stakeholder interviews. Second, the analysis focused primarily on the Indonesian context; therefore, the findings may not be directly generalizable to Islamic educational systems in other countries with different policy environments. Finally, the study examined incremental policy development from a conceptual and documentary perspective, without quantitatively assessing the effectiveness of policy implementation at the institutional level.

5. Partial Conclusion

Overall, the discussion confirms that the contemporary development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia is characterized by an incremental policy approach that emphasizes gradual policy refinement, institutional adaptation, and sustainable capacity building. The interaction among institutional, governmental, socio-cultural, political, and contemporary factors demonstrates that incremental policymaking represents a realistic and adaptive strategy for managing educational change within complex Islamic educational institutions. These findings provide a strong foundation for the final conclusion by highlighting that sustainable policy development depends not only on gradual reform but also on the integration of adaptive governance and strategic innovation to ensure the long-term quality and resilience of Islamic education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the development of madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia through the perspective of Lindblom's incrementalism theory. The findings demonstrate that the contemporary development of Islamic educational institutions has been characterized by an incremental policy approach rather than comprehensive structural reform. Incremental policymaking was reflected in the gradual refinement of educational regulations, curriculum development, professional improvement of teachers and religious educators, institutional

governance reform, and the progressive expansion of educational funding. Furthermore, the study identified that the incremental policy process is influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including institutional leadership, organizational capacity, government regulations, financial support, educational decentralization, socio-cultural values, political commitment, bureaucratic coordination, and contemporary challenges such as digital transformation and globalization. Collectively, these findings indicate that gradual policy adaptation has enabled madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools to preserve their institutional identity while continuously improving educational quality and responding to changing societal needs.

The study contributes theoretically by extending the application of Lindblom's incrementalism theory to the context of Islamic education policy, demonstrating that sustainable educational development can be achieved through continuous policy refinement and institutional adaptation. Practically, the findings provide insights for policymakers and educational leaders to formulate more adaptive, evidence-based, and sustainable policies for Islamic educational institutions. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its reliance on library research and documentary analysis without empirical field investigation. Future studies are therefore encouraged to employ qualitative fieldwork, mixed-methods approaches, or comparative cross-country analyses to examine how incremental policy is implemented and experienced by policymakers, school leaders, teachers, and Islamic boarding school communities in different educational settings.

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