



## The Implementation and Improvisation of Islamic School Curriculum in Buddhist Country

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### Abstrak

Thailand adalah salah satu negara Budha terbesar di Asia Tenggara, oleh karena itu nilai-nilai dan budaya Budha tak terelakkan lagi pasti mengintervensi dunia pendidikannya, termasuk kurikulumnya. Sangat menarik untuk menyelidiki bagaimana sekolah Islam di Thailand mengatur dan mengembangkan kurikulumnya sendiri untuk menyeimbangkan kepentingan nasional yang dipengaruhi oleh agama Budha dengan ajaran, nilai-nilai, dan budaya Islam yang dimiliki oleh sekolah tersebut. Artikel ini mencoba menggambarkan Sekolah Songkhla Islam Anuban sebagai salah satu sekolah Islam yang mengadaptasi kebijakan pendidikan nasional dalam upaya menyusun kurikulum mereka sendiri yang berakar pada visi-visi keislaman. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa Sekolah Songkhla tidak menerapkan semua kebijakan yang diberlakukan oleh pemerintah secara resmi, karena memang pada dasarnya tidak semuanya kompatibel dengan visinya sebagai sekolah Islam.

### Abstract

*Thailand is one of the greatest Buddhist country in Southeast Asia, therefore the Buddhism values and culture inevitably intervene education, including the curriculum. It is interesting to investigate how Islamic school arranges and develops its own curriculum in order to balance the national interest influenced by Buddhism and the Islamic belief, values, and culture owned by the school in Thailand. This article tries to illustrate Anuban Islam Songkhla School as one of the Islamic schools adapts the national educational policy and arranges their curriculum rooted on Islamic vision. This research found that Songkhla School does not implement all policy endorsed by the government officially due to its incompatibility with the Islamic vision of the school.*

## INTRODUCTION

Thailand is one of the countries that administer Kingship and Buddhism education. Kingship is the embodiment of Thailand's form of state, i.e., kingdom. Other than that, the Buddhism concept is applied as it is the most-believed religion in which nearly 85% of Thais embrace it. Therefore, matters relating to Buddhism must be learned by all schools in Thailand, aiming to preserve cultural heritage including beliefs about Buddhism (Brahmagunabhorn, 2000).

This policy binds even in Thailand's government schools. Every student, including Muslims, must study Buddhism as a compulsory subject (Busrowi, 2013). However, the remaining 15% of the population of Thailand, precisely in the southern part of Thailand, is inhabited by Muslims who are Malay and show different learning, especially Muslim-based schools. This is a common phenomenon occurring in southern Thailand (Brahmagunabhorn, 2000).

The distinctiveness of Thailand is interesting to study, especially the link between the cultural reality of Buddhism and Education. Sweinstani et al. (2015), for example, compared Education in Thailand and Indonesia. They stated that some distinctions such as different definitions of education decentralization, actors in the policy formulation process, education resources, and the relevance behavior between policy formulator and policy implementation, will give impact to the basic education structure flexibility. Based on the theory and the finding, it can be inferred that the structure in education policy in Thailand is better than in Indonesia.

Other related research was carried out by Haji-Awang (2016) concerning the schools' system in the Pluralistic Society of the Three Southern Border Provinces of Thailand. He showed that there are significant traits of the model schools in the multicultural society are not merely performed well in administrative procedure, teaching and learning process, but these schools also able to reveal the real social norm and religious belief into communities' practical life as a truly "Malay-Muslim" society. It means that the school is able to run the integrated programs under the shade of philosophy of Islamic education paralleled the National Education aims to ensure that the productivities of the programs able to serve both sides, national education on the one hand and the Malay Muslim communities' satisfaction on the other hand.

Subsequent research from Raihani et al. (2016) indicated that the deliveries of Islamic fell squarely within the concept of teaching into religion using a heavy confessional approach. Indoctrination with a little encouragement of critical thinking was common in Islamic classes. The presentation of other faiths and cultures was designed to explore their weaknesses and fallacies from a single believed-Islamic perspective. Further, Raihani (2017) also examined further the focus on the dimensions of leadership in schools, especially in dealing with the context of education problems and the socio-cultural context specificities in southern Thailand. A more comprehensive picture of Islamic Education in Thailand and its reform orientation can be seen from several studies by Hifza and Asla (2019), Liow (2009b, 2009a), and Wekke et al. (2018).

The mentioned studies portray the general phenomena of Islamic-based schools mainly on how Islamic-based schools in southern Thailand are managed by orienting to balance the national educational goals and Islamic mission. This paper tries to complement the prior studies by focusing on a school, i.e., Anuban Islamic Songkhla school mainly the school curriculum as the internal policy concerning the Thailand government's educational regulations which are mostly inspired by Buddhism values. This study contributed to the curriculum studies particularly the comparative curriculum studies (see Flinders & Thornton, 2004).

## METHOD

This is a qualitative study which employed natural research objects. Researchers, as a key instrument, collected the data using triangulation (combined) and the data were analyzed inductively using Miles and Huberman's analysis, while the results of the research-especially this research-emphasize more on the description of the phenomena (Sugiyono, 2016).

Data and data sources used by the researchers included primary and secondary data. This study's primary data consisted of interview results and observations regarding the curriculum implementation at Anuban Islamic Songkhla School, Thailand. The primary data were obtained through interviews and direct observation of the School Director and Manager of Anuban Islamic Songkhla School. References from several books, journals, websites and data reinforcement about curriculum implementation in Anuban Islamic Songkhla School were also

gathered. Other documents like Lesson Plan and Thailand national curriculum were also collected.

The study was conducted on August 5, 2017, to September 27, 2017 (2 months) at Anuban Islamic Songkhla School, Pak Ban Na Thap, Chana District, Songkhla, Southern Thailand, Thailand. Three data collection techniques were employed including observation, interviews and documentation studies. The researchers chose the Principal, Teacher and also the school manager namely Teacher Din and Malinee as the interviewees.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study showed that the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School applied the 2008 core curriculum is guided by the 2008 core curriculum documents from the government, yet remain to carry out Islamic values. The 2008 curriculum document was developed equivalently to the 2001 curriculum through more detailed preparation.

In this document, the introduction outlines the vision and goals as well as various information and input regarding reasons for changing the 2001 curriculum, the importance of core competencies of students and the desired character, time allocation, and learning management. Each of the eight learning domains devotes to subjects in grades I of elementary school to class XII, there is a special room, a clear picture of the standard of learning, and a grade-level indicator.

On the other hand, the Islamic values adopted by the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School are embodiments of Islamic activities; for instance, morning prayer. Starting from Anuban 1 to Pratom 4, all read the verses of the Qur'an before teaching and learning activities begin. Moreover, Teacher Din stated,

So, students chant some Islamic songs every morning. Those were chosen by me, and only in this school. usually, the fourth grade does that activity (sholawat and pray together) so do the first and second grade but rarely, and then there's azkrat nabawi, or morning azkrat like in Indonesia. I want them to believe that they are Moslem.

Based on observations of Anuban Islamic Songkhla School students, the students do the dhuha prayer in the congregation right after the flag ceremony. They take a turn praying in the

mosque and followed by reciting short Quran Surahs, about 10 surahs for about 20 minutes before starting the lesson.

The Al-Qur'an recitation is divided into two namely Pratom and Anuban. Pratom carries out the activity in their respective class. Meanwhile, Anuban is divided into Anuban 1, 2, and 3. The Anuban 1 and 2 are made into a class in Anuban classroom 2 while Anuban 3 remains in Anuban 3. The purpose of reciting the verses of the Qur'an and ten short surahs is for the students to understand each other's hearts as revealed by Master Malinee,

They remember, I want them to understand about Islam thoroughly, I wish too, the surahs are An-Nas, Al-Falaq, Al-Ikhlās, An-Nasr, Al-Kafirun, Al-Kautsar, Al-Asr, Al-Ma'un, Al-Fill, At-Tin.

The observation uncovered the truth of Teacher Malinee's statements. This was seen from a student named Fathoni who can memorize more than 10 surahs. Fathoni is in the Anuban 2 class or kindergarten level 2. Another application of Islamic knowledge seen at Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is the praying together which usually pronounce before eating, after eating, before going to sleep and after waking up. Following is the statement from Teacher Malinee,

Yeah, and when they pray, before sleeping, drinking milk, and having lunch. They also pray after lunch.

The next finding is about the main components of the curriculum that comprise vision, goals, key competencies, learning standards, desirable activity, and learner's development activity. The vision of the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School, consisting of three visions, was revealed by Teacher Din, they are 1) Broad knowledge; 2) healthy and 3) virtuous. These visions portray the school goal which not only focuses on instilling Islamic values but also secular science to survive the globalization era. This paradigm suggests an openness of the school to modernization, which always entails competing influences from both bodies of knowledge or disciplines during the process.

Nonetheless, there was a clear message from the principals, teachers, and students that Islamic religion should be the guiding principles to measure whether new sciences are valid or not, even though it was not clear as to what actions the schools would take if one of the same subjects or content was against the understood

Islamic teachings. The presence of religious and cultural diversity in the curriculum of Islamic studies is one of the emphases of this research. Our analysis of the curriculum documents and interviews with the principals and teachers suggested that religious and cultural diversity were not explicitly and systematically contained in the curriculum (Raihani, 2016).

The objective to be achieved by the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is the advancement of science and Islam. However, based on the documentary study results from the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School curriculum, the school goal is the capability to analyze based on their critical thinking through the scientific and mathematics process. As a type of school that provides Islamic teaching but is part of the national curriculum, Islamic teaching takes place systematically and repeatedly in the student activities both in and out of class.

Next, the expected key competencies are generally divided into five, namely 1) Communication skills; 2) Thinking skills; 3) Problem-solving skills; 4) Capacity for applying lifeskill; 5) Capacity for technological application. In application, the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is more focused on communication skills, problem-solving skills, and capacity for applying lifeskill. Referring to Teacher Din, the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School provides English, Malay, and Mandarin as subjects to improve language skills. However, there was only English that becomes the compulsory subject for all classes. The allocation of time given for English subjects ranges from 80 to 160 hours per year. This happens as English is the international language that must be learned by all learners in Thailand. According to Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick (2016)

English is taught as a compulsory subject across the nation. International conferences, tourism, and global advertising are the domains in which English is spoken. A limited but distinct presence of English can be seen in the media as well. The country hosts a small number of English TV programs and a radio station in English and there are two daily English newspapers (The Bangkok Post and The Nation). As of 2010, over 880 international education programs throughout the country used English as the medium of instruction.

There is a continuity between the second and third competence. The manifestation of these skills includes farming, cooking, and bicycle repairing. The first two activities are life skills

while the latter is the real problem-solving skill implementation.

Referring to the 2008 curriculum, there are eight standard contents to learn by all students of all levels, they are 1) Thai language; 2) foreign languages; 3) mathematics; 4) Science; 5) Social studies (religion, economy, history, and geography); 6) Technology; 7) Health Education; 8) Art (music, culture). These eight standard contents are split into practical and theoretical subjects. The practical subjects include art and health education, while the theoretical subjects comprise the Thai language, foreign languages, mathematics, science, social studies (religion, economy, history, and geography), as well as technology and occupation.

The first content standard is the Thai language, which has been the mandatory subject for all schools including Anuban Islamic Songkhla School which is The Government-sponsored school. This is in line with what Medrano (cited in Nasir, 2015) explained that

The government-sponsored school is a type of school offering Islamic education in conjunction with the national curriculum. The language of instruction is Thai.

The Thai language is very important to be learned by all Thai people. Due to the high level of importance, the Thai language fills around 200 hours per year. The materials learned include reading, writing, speaking. These skills are reflected in an annual event enshrined in every Thai school, this is held on August 12th in which Thai people celebrate the Thai Mother's Day.

According to Tossawad & Somsir (cited in Wattanawaha, 1996, pp. 413-425) the nine-year compulsory education program organized by the Thai government loads some of the subjects that must be studied well by all learners. These subjects include the Thai language, Thai culture, and arithmetic. This is following the policies of King Chulalongkorn V who opened the first school in 1871 for the children of government officials. The subjects of instruction were the Thai language, Thai culture, and arithmetic. The schools were tuition and lunch-free, moreover, it provided free uniforms. The graduates of the school were expected to work for the government Sookajorn.

The statement of King Chulalongkorn V is related to the competencies that must be mastered by learners in the 21st century (see Haryono, Subkhan, & Widhanarto, 2017). Whereas, to achieve the expected competencies, the output

certainly must have a capacity in subjects like English, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history and the public administration. In the studied schools, the implementation of the policy is reflected through foreign language learnings, as what Teacher Din said that Anuban Islamic Songkhla School teaches foreign languages; English and Mandarin.

However, the observation results found no Mandarin teaching and learning practice but English as the only subject studied in terms of foreign languages. The Anuban Islamic Songkhla School also puts English as a subject accompanying the Thai language. The time is allocated around 80 hours for a year/around 3.75 hours in a week/45 minutes in one meeting.

In terms of foreign language learning, 45 minutes is a short time. Therefore, some schools organize a program named Patong English camp to extend the time for learning English. This is a 3-day annual program that obliges students to use English in all communication matters. The Patong English camp program was initiated by several schools in the Hatyai district and is located at Watkuaneang School. The practice of English is seen from the Patong English Camp program. The camp proves that learning English is not always a class sit-in. In a camp, students could present their English skills through drama, musical activities, or speech.

There are four sub-subject of social studies, they are history, economics, geography, and religion. The Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is indeed best implemented the religion due to the school's philosophy. On the other hand, there is no sign of other sub-subjects taught in the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School.

Generally, the implementation of the 2008 curriculum's content standard in the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is quite good. The success of the first content standard is shown in the students' favorable Thai language skills. However, some of them are more likely to speak in Malay. Other subjects like English, mathematics, science, and social studies are taught as should. The practical subjects like health education and arts are also taught outdoor very well.

The health education is usually filled with morning exercise done after the flag ceremony and followed by all school members including teachers and staff. Similarly, art subject, which prioritizes outdoor learning, is filled with traditional Thai songs or traditional Thai dance. The aim is, of course, to introduce students to the

cultural heritage of Thailand to prevent it from extinction.

Next, the implementation of Thailand's national curriculum is related to the desired activity. The Basic Education Core Curriculum focuses on learners' development for attainment of the following desirable characteristics, enabling learners to enjoy a life of harmony among others as Thai citizens and global citizens: (1) Love of nation, religion, and monarchy; (2) Honesty and Integrity; (3) Self-discipline; (4) Avidity for learning; (5) Observance of principles of Sufficiency Economy Philosophy in one's way of life; (6) Dedication and commitment to work; (7) Cherishing Thai nationalism; and (8) Public-mindedness.

The first point's implementation is reflected through the flag ceremony carried out from Monday to Friday. This shows that Thai people's patriotism has been brought up since school age. The discipline could also be seen during the flag ceremony in which each person coming late would receive sanction (Yunardi, 2014).

Furthermore, the learner's development quality as a part of national curriculum implementation is seen from the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School student activities of cooking, farming, and repairing. This is revealed by Teacher Din as the principal,

The activities are selected by the decision-makers of educational policies. For instance, planting, repairing, cooking, and knitting. As a result, teachers need to prepare all the things needed in carrying out the activities.

Nonetheless, the learner's development quality at Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is not following what was written in The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (A.D. 2008) which emphasizes that learner's development quality is divided into three: (1) counseling activities, (2) student activities, and (3) activities for social and public interest.

The observation results in Anuban Islamic Songkhla School unveiled that there was no counseling teacher found as counseling activities are carried out by the teachers or even the principal. Other than that, no other social activities seen in the school.

The free-school policy, full-day school, and compulsory learning are genuinely applied at the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School. The regulation that governs the free-school policy is

the 2542 National Education Act, article 6 and 7 as follows.

#### Article 6

The provision of education shall be for the development of Thai people to be a perfect human being including body, mind, intelligence, knowledge, and virtue and to have morality and culture in living life and capable of living with other people happy.

#### Article 7

A Learning process shall aim at instilling a correct conscience relating to politics and administration of a democratic form of government with the King as Head of State, an awareness to protect and promote right, duty, liberty, respect of law, equality, and human dignity, a sense of pride to be Thai, an awareness to protect public and national interest, as well as promoting religious, art, national culture, sport, folk wisdom, Thai wisdom, and universal knowledge, along with preserving natural resources and environment, a capability to make a living, and awareness to be self-reliance, having creativity, longing for knowledge, and self-studying continuously" (Translation of the National Education Act 2542).

Article 6 explains the purpose of Thailand's education to form perfect human beings in terms of healthy body, mind, intelligence, knowledge and moral values. Therefore, the eight content standards of the 2008 curriculum are formed and currently applied in all schools in Thailand without exception. Further, the manifestation of article 7 is shown through the flag ceremony in which all students join it without exception. To the extent, kindergarten graders also involve in it, proving their love and pride for their country and king.

The observation results revealed that the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School has applied the full-day school system; five active days and two off-days. The school day starts at 8.30 a.m. and ends at 3.00 p.m. for the Anuban and 4.00 p.m. for the Pratom. Learners especially the primary school graders receive theoretical subjects before 1.00 p.m. and get practical lessons after that. These findings are parallel with the principal's statement as follows.

Surely, here we have so many hours for each subject, which split into two periods. The first period, up to 1.00 p.m., teaches the theoretical subjects and the second period, which lasts up to the last school hour, teaches practical les-

sons such as physical learning, farming, gardening.

The concept of free-school goes beyond the researchers' expectations. Instead of tuition-fee only, the school also provides free books, lunch, and milk. The lunch is given during lunchtime and the milk is distributed to the learners at 10.00 a.m. (Pratom) and 3.00 p.m. (Anuban). This fact is strengthened by Teacher Din's claim.

We can choose the books by ourselves freely, we don't care who the publisher is so long as the content fits the applicable curriculum. Books, stationary, lunch, milk, and a set of uniform are given for free.

The statement from Teacher Din is proven by the existence of a law regulating the implementation of Thailand Education i.e., the Constitution of the Thai Kingdom (Kod Mai Raj) in 1997 article 3 verse 43, stating that,

Every Thai person has the same right for coming to formal educations from primary education until middle school up to 12 years. In this case, the government has to hold an education freely, without any payment.

Another regulation that promotes free school is the Constitution of the Thai Kingdom year 1997 article 3 paragraph 3 which covers the distribution of (1) free uniform for all students without exception; (2) free books that are adjusted to the school request; (3) free of tuition up to Mattayom level (equivalent to junior high school).

Each school determines its lunch menu using the budget allocation from the Thai Government. Usually, cooks are hired by the school administrators to prepare lunch. On the other hand, milk is given evenly through trucks. As a result, a wide variety of lunch is found throughout Thailand schools but they have the same milk and uniform brand. This evidence of free-school policy shows no contrary fact to the regulation implementation in the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School.

The documentation study discovered the rules of King Chulalongkorn V (King Rama V) which establishes Thai culture as one of the lessons to be learned and turned out to be strengthened by the regulation of King Rama VI which transformed ideas from Thainess and Thai nation into Buddhist-based ideas. It is more clearly described by Satanayurak (cited in Kaur et al., 2016, p. 353) along these lines

Thai-style governance is fealty to the king, reciprocity-based relationships between social

classes, as well as other aspects of Thai art and culture that focused on kingship and Buddhism.

The large Buddhist population has underlined the rules of King Rama VI (Brahmagunabhorn, 2000; Liow, 2009b, 2009a; Sweinstani et al., 2015). However, this does not mean that this rule applies to all Thais as Thai Muslims do not heed Buddhist regulations including the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School. The school does not provide anything related to Buddhism like a temple but a mosque. However, it remains to be obedient to the King, which regulates to implement the 2008 curriculum. In sum, the King Rama VI regulation is partly applied due to the school's Islamic principle which is in contrast to the national education policy.

## CONCLUSION

This research concluded that: (1) the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School implements the 2008 curriculum thoroughly as suggested by the Thai government; (2) the 2008 core curriculum components are compatible with those applied at the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School, and (3) the implementation of the 2008 core curriculum at the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School is also based on the applicable policies like the 2542 National Education Act, article 6 and 7 and the Constitution of the Thai Kingdom year 1997 article 3 paragraph 3 Thailand (Kod Mai Raj). Overall, the implementation of the Islamic curriculum in the Anuban Islamic Songkhla School has not been supported by government policies specifically for Muslim schools. Nevertheless, the school has always been able to strike a balance between the Islamic vision and the state intervention that demands schools to be loyal to the state (nationalism) and also contributes to preserving the values of Buddhism.

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