

Enhancing the Islamic education in Kurikulum Merdeka through international benchmarking: A transdisciplinary study

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to investigate the application of benchmarking in Indonesian education and offer solutions to develop benchmarking within the Islamic education curriculum within *Kurikulum Merdeka*, Indonesia's national curriculum. The goal is to improve the quality of Islamic education nationally and internationally. The study method is descriptive qualitative research with a transdisciplinary perspective, drawing on relevant literature sources from Islamic education, applied sciences, and business disciplines. The results suggest that further development of international benchmarking in internal, external, strategic, process, performance, general, and functional benchmarking is necessary to develop the Islamic education curriculum. It should be based on collaboration and global standards and involve a transdisciplinary approach. The study highlights the need for benchmarking to move beyond a formality in national education standards and to be integrated into Islamic education to improve education quality and compete globally.

Keywords: *Benchmarking, Islamic education, Kurikulum Merdeka, TQM, transdisciplinary approach*

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INTRODUCTION

Benchmarking is one of the most successful processes for assessing and improving the business sector (Tsiotras, 2017). The education sector has also adopted this process, including educational organizations, institutions, and national governments. Benchmarking is utilized for self-improvement and self-regulation, with prominent organizations such as The World Bank, UNESCO, and national governments in North America, Europe, and Australia utilizing it to achieve sustainable quality (Shonhiwa, 2014). According to the European Commission, benchmarking could be a modern management instrument for improving institutional performance and adapting to recent challenges (Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015) in both national and international contexts; benchmarking should be conducted at all levels of education. In Indonesia's education system, benchmarking is mandated by government regulation, specifically Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards (SNP). Clause 4 of this regulation aims to increase the quality of national education by implementing benchmarking as a form of quality assurance (Suluri, 2019).

Quality assurance in national education also aims to provide Indonesian citizens with competitive, intelligent, and well-rounded individuals who can excel at the regional, national, and international levels (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). The quality of education is considered high quality when the learning process at educational institutions is conducted

interactively, inspiring, enjoyably, and challengingly, and motivates students to achieve their best actively. Moreover, it provides ample room for initiative, creativity, and independence that align with the student's talents, interests, and physical as well as psychological development of the students (Alfath & Azizah, 2022). It forms the basis of implementation in the Kurikulum Merdeka to improve the quality of national education, including Islamic education, through local, national, and global benchmarking.

The primary objective of benchmarking in Islamic education is to compare an institution with superior performance or similar institutions, aiming to identify, adopt, and implement role models that result in significant outcomes. This process is undertaken at the institutional level and for students, educators, and members of the institution. The benchmarking achievement indicators are marked by two aspects, namely deductive aspects, where an institution is capable of establishing and executing its vision and mission, and inductive aspects, where an institution can fulfill the needs of the community, the workforce, and professional requirements (Erawati Siregar, 2021), and moral requirements in their relevance to the Islamic education curriculum (FTIK UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, 2020), mainly focused on the formation and strengthening of character based on the framework of the Pancasila Student Profile (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021). Many countries have established national benchmarking systems, and there is growing evidence that national standards meet international benchmarks, which helps measure students' competitiveness index in the labor market (World Bank, 2012). The achievement of both benchmarking indicators in the Islamic education curriculum is then implemented through the Kurikulum Merdeka, which is developed in the form of a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary (MIT) approach that shows dialogue, integration, and collaboration between academic disciplines in improving institutional and personal competence in the form of international benchmarking and focusing on the collaboration and partnership (Tasopoulou & Tsiotras, 2017). Benchmarking, as part of education quality assurance or Total Quality Management (TQM) in Islamic education, must strive for better education and satisfaction in the learning process, learning outputs, and learning outcomes (Syukri et al., 2019) to develop and transform stakeholders in institutions (Sumarto & Harahap, 2019).

However, the current Islamic education curriculum must be developed, lagging, and negatively classified (Billah, 2020), particularly at primary and secondary education levels. It lacks a clear vision and a strong spirit of inquiry and is heavily focused on memorization-oriented learning styles (Bakar, 2015). Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes separated spirituality-entity individualism, dichotomy perspective, and normative-deductive methods (Agustina & Shalihin, 2022; Musrifah, 2018; Shalihin et al., 2022). Despite numerous studies on Islamic education curricula that have been conducted using multi-inter to transdisciplinary (MIT) approaches, there still needs to be more studies in the form of an international benchmarking model at the school level (elementary to senior high school) compared to the university level. It is essential to note that the context of this discussion pertains to the current state of the Islamic education curriculum. Studies related to developing Islamic education curricula by implementing national benchmarking models have adopted a monodisciplinary approach (Ayuningsih et al., 2020; Handayani & Istanto, 2019; Atmojo et al., 2022). Islamic-based institutions that have developed their benchmarking in the international model have focused more on adopting international curricula (Dini Fitria et al., 2021; Fiki Amalia & Candra Sayekti, 2016; Islam & Fajaria, 2022; Nafisah, 2018) without involving MIT approaches in benchmarking the curriculum. It has resulted in the slow achievement of benchmarking indicators in the Islamic education curriculum.

The management of the Islamic education curriculum must evolve towards progressivity and modernity, as suggested by Shalihin, Bahriya, and Wantini (2019), rather than remaining monodisciplinary through implementing new benchmarking models at the local, national, and international levels. The aspects of educational management must be seriously addressed to strengthen and enhance Islamic education (Salleh, 2013). Islamic education management must

adopt and develop an interdisciplinary and progressive model. This research contributes to an international benchmarking model for Islamic education curricula that address contemporary issues and competitive situations (Syukri et al., 2019). The quality assurance of curriculum Islamic education also has advantages over national education because of its dual role as the institution and subject (Shalihin & Widodo, 2019). It has become more marketable for stakeholders to improve and increase (Umar & Ismail, 2017) the benchmarking of Islamic education curriculum for quality assurance. Therefore, this study aims to develop the benchmarking model for Islamic curriculum education as part of total quality management (TQM) in a transdisciplinary approach. The transdisciplinary approach in this study analyzes the benchmarking of Islamic curriculum education based on an understanding of the complexities across disciplines. This method is used to expand understanding using a non-linear approach (Amin Abdullah, 2014)), particularly among Islamic education, social sciences, and applied sciences as the main essence of the transdisciplinary approach. This study will examine the historical and sociological foundations of benchmarking, its application in education, and the development of benchmarking within the Islamic education curriculum using a transdisciplinary approach.

METHOD

In this study, we employ a descriptive qualitative research method using a library research approach. It involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinions on a research question, which is a necessary component of every research method at some point (Mary W. George, 2008). Data collection techniques are conducted through documentation studies of relevant sources, including journals, theses, dissertations, and other scientific works. The data collection process includes several stages, such as keyword searches, subject searches, sorting of scholarly books and articles, citation searches in scholarly sources, searches through published bibliographies, people sources, and systemic browsing related to the research (Thomas Mann, 2023), especially regarding benchmarking the Islamic education curriculum in the Kurikulum Merdeka.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The Genealogy of Benchmarking

The concept of benchmarking first appeared in the business and industrial sectors, initially in Japan. Various firms, such as Rank Xerox, Toyota, Motorola, AT&T, Ford, and General Electric, became the pioneers of benchmarking (KipsangKailong, 2019). In industry terms, benchmarking means discovering and learning about best practices or products from different sources (Krishnamoorthy & D'Lima, 2014). It involves continuous comparison and measurement of products or services (Muhith, 2017) and is used to bring about significant improvements in performance, cost control, service quality, and profitability (Alosani, Al-Dhaafri, & Yusoff, 2016). Robert Camp, the guru of benchmarking, defines it as the search for industry best practices towards achieving superior performance (KipsangKailong, 2019). In companies, benchmarking is an essential component of continuous improvement (Gomes & Yasin, 2011) and is also applied in the industrial sector for measuring performance. Benchmarking encourages organizations to examine competitors' processes that have been implemented effectively and proven to deliver better output and outcomes. Additionally, benchmarking can help organizations reach their goals more efficiently by using competitors as role models and learning from their failures and mistakes, thus reducing the likelihood of making the same errors (Gomes & Yasin, 2011).

The term "benchmarking" is defined in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as a theoretical method to assess the quality or level of comparable entities. In practical terms, benchmarking is a

humbling process of acknowledging the superiority of an individual or entity and leveraging it to achieve excellence. It involves learning from the best and striving to surpass it (Krishnamoorthy & D'Lima, 2014). Benchmarking has long served as a normative standard in business practices, despite ongoing debates among experts. As Jacobson and Hillkirk of Xerox define it, benchmarking entails the identification of leading competitors or companies with top-quality products or services, cost-effectiveness, and expertise. By adopting their best practices, companies can aim to attain excellence (Sumarto & Harahap, 2019). As per the observations of Gregory H. Watson, a professional industrial engineer, benchmarking is a process that entails evaluating a company's performance relative to its industry peers, as documented by Krishnamoorthy and D'Lima (2014), with the primary objective of enhancing its overall performance (Chowdhury & Mukhopadhyaya, 2012). This widely used term has gained prominence in the business realm to assess performance.

In contemporary times, benchmarking has evolved and found widespread application across various aspects of academia and business, encompassing different products (Kurniawan, 2020), commerce, and industrial sectors. The concept of benchmarking has been replicated by government organizations (GOs) and non-profit organizations in numerous developed countries (Chowdhury & Mukhopadhyaya, 2012). The theory of benchmarking is based on Deming's four-phase PDCA cycle. The first phase, Plan, involves setting the benchmarking target and determining the individuals or groups involved. The second phase, Do, requires collecting data and information about the relevant institutions. The third phase, Check, involves analyzing and calculating the data to develop recommendations, while the final phase, Act, entails adapting, improving, and implementing the findings from the benchmarking process.

As proposed by the American Productivity & Quality Center (APQC), the operational system of benchmarking comprises four phases that resemble the Deming Cycle. The first phase, Planning, involves training and forming a benchmarking team, identifying areas of focus, the scope of the study, critical success factors (CSFs), and defining the data collection process. The second phase, Data Collection, involves collecting instrument data, identifying potential partners, and evaluating the results. The third phase, Data Analysis, and Reporting, entails comparing the data from the benchmarking and benchmarked institution, identifying gaps, and developing a plan to address the gaps. The final phase, Adaptation, involves monitoring and reporting the process, communicating the results internally (to the benchmarking institution) and externally (to the benchmarked institution), and setting up the next improvement cycle.

On the other hand, Watson (1993) proposed five levels of benchmarking models (Table 1). The first generation, estimated to have occurred before 1976, involved reverse engineering or competitive product analysis, with a technical and engineering-based approach used to compare products. The second generation, estimated to have occurred between 1976-1986, involved competitive benchmarking of processes with competitors, focusing on product efficiency rather than product orientation. The third generation, estimated to have taken place between 1982-1988, involved process benchmarking of generic processes, not confined to competitors. According to Watson, the third generation enabled learning from "outsiders" or non-competitors of the business, focusing on identifying similarities in processes. The fourth generation, which has been running from 1976 to the present, involves strategic marketing, where the strategy for evaluating and implementing alternatives is based on adapting business alliance strategies. Finally, the fifth generation, also known as global benchmarking among international markets, involves extending to macro variables (Taschner, 2016), such as culture, trade, and business in the company competition (Evans, Tisak, & Williamson, 2012). This type of benchmarking is the focus of this paper.

Table 1: Watson's primary benchmarking models utilized by scholars (Evans et al., 2012)

Generation	< 5 years	Master thesis	Doctoral dissertations	Total
First (product oriented)	50	9	14	23
Second (competitor's processes)	5	1	4	5
Third (generic processes, not to confined competitors)	126	31	111	142
Fourth (strategies applied by business partners)	14	2	19	21
Fifth (extending to macro variables)	9	3	6	9
Cumulative totals	174	46	154	200

As noted by Watson, benchmarking has found widespread application in best practices across various industries, although scholars and academics still need to embrace it as a practitioner fully. Watson proposed benchmarking in the past, and its practices have been refined over time, leading to the development of benchmarking models (Evans et al., 2012). Drawing from Watson's benchmarking, practitioners in education, particularly those in the fifth generation, can adopt a typical type of benchmarking, although its implementation remains limited as it involves numerous variables. Irrespective of the approach adopted by different organizations, benchmarking aims to achieve organizational goals by enhancing outputs and outcomes and emulating the best practices of role models to enhance performance and even exceed it. Benchmarking promotes the transformation, enhancement, and production of distinct organizational management styles, improving quality assurance. This study will focus on fifth-generation global benchmarking in Islamic education progression, extending to macro variables. The researchers put forth a proposition that the fifth generation, referred to as global benchmarking in international markets for trades, cultures, and businesses (Evans et al., 2012), or international benchmarking as named in this study (Tasopoulou & Tsiotras, 2017), encompasses various practices that will be implemented in this paper. Specifically, this will be done in the context of the Islamic education curriculum, utilizing a transdisciplinary approach. Furthermore, the aim of the international benchmarking approach, as the fifth generation in Watson's model, is to establish a distinguished reputation on the international stage, both in the education and business sectors.

Discussion

Benchmarking in Education

In the early 1990s, North America was known as the first region to introduce benchmarking in higher education by establishing NACUBO (National Association of College and University Business Officers) (Tsiotras, 2017). Benchmarking was adopted in Australia, the United Kingdom and Europe, and Africa, the last continent to embrace this practice (Shonhiwa, 2014). Benchmarking has been widely embraced in the education sector as an effective means of enhancing quality assurance. It involves using standardized tests developed within institutional units of education, both in the past and present, to improve future outcomes (Syukri et al., 2019). Benchmarking in education is an ongoing activity of engagement and measurement (Muhith, 2017). It involves self-study and comparison with leaders in the field to identify, adopt, and apply significantly better practices. This is determined by expertise ranks, including essential, standard, sound, and excellent performance (Tsiotras, 2017).

In education, the term benchmarking has various meanings but shares similar concepts and techniques. Blackstock (2012) defines benchmarking as a systematic activity of self-evaluation and self-improvement through collaborative comparison with similar organizations to identify weaknesses and strengths, learn to adapt, and set new targets to achieve the best performance (Tsiotras, 2017). In his opinion, Harvey defines benchmarking as a process of setting standards, identifying, and learning from good practices from other institutions. Benneworth (2010) argues that benchmarking is a strategy for institutions to progress and remain competitive. Jackson also proposed benchmarking as a desire to learn, understand, and lead the improvement of institutions. According to Jackson and Lund (2000), benchmarking is a learning process to compare services,

activities, practices, and products to identify strengths and weaknesses for self-regulation and self-improvement (Shonhiwa, 2014). Meanwhile, UNESCO-CEPES defines benchmarking as a standardized method for reporting and collecting crucial data to compare the performances of different programs or institutions. It aims to identify good practices by diagnosing problems and strengths (Tsiotras, 2017).

The UK Higher Education Funding Council (2012) defines benchmarking as a valuable tool to identify efficiencies, control costs, and help colleges make the most of scarce resources (Ruby, 2013). Benchmarking in education involves examining and understanding internal work procedures, followed by searching for best practices in other institutions or organizations that match the identified areas for improvement. In short, benchmarking in education is a systemic approach to learning from others and adopting practices to improve institutional performance (Amat Jaedun, 2011). The purpose of benchmarking is to encourage institutions to identify similar competitors and adopt the best practices they have successfully applied, resulting in improved performance (Kurniawan, 2020).

Ki Hajar Dewantara, the Founding Father of National Education Indonesia, initiated his paradigm about benchmarking in three classes with *Tri N*, known as *Niteni* (remembering something learned), *Niru* (imitating something learned), and *Nambahi* (developing something learned) (Wijayanti, 2018). The term "3N" represents the creative and innovative benchmarking levels, particularly in education. Based on various paradigms, benchmarking in education is defined as an organizational (school) activity that involves self-evaluation and comparison with the best schools as role models to identify, adopt, and apply significantly better practices (Amat Jaedun, 2011). Furthermore, one of the significant benefits of benchmarking in education is the step towards breaking isolation and looking for new ways to improve quality and reduce costs in the most efficient manner possible. This leads to improvements and the production of better products, even surpassing the current standard (Muhith, 2017). Benchmarking from the educational perspective has similarities with the systemic attempt to achieve performance improvement and adopt the best quality of institutions or companies as role models. However, benchmarking in education is related to collaborative actions rather than the competitive rivalry between companies. Therefore, we define benchmarking in educational institutions (schools) as an introductory section that must be implemented by all members of the school community to improve the work performance of educational institutions (Kurniawan, 2020), to achieve their goals and develop their unique characteristics, individuals must engage in self-evaluation and adopt the best practices that promote collaborative education rather than competition-oriented progression.

Benchmarking as a methodology of study (Tsiotras, 2017) and fundamental design in education shares with comparative style questions like the choice of comparators, who, how many, and from what field? The responses from comparative questions were divided into within-field (concentrates on similar constitutions) and across-field benchmarks (different constitutions). The comparison style is not limited to both similar institutions (such as vocational and general education) and across the fields or inter-groups (such as health-education and education-business) (Ruby, 2013). This form of interdisciplinary benchmarking will be discussed in the next section. In addition, benchmarking the national education system to embody the mission and vision of the country's education requires benchmarking for each educational institution based on specific criteria. These criteria include: (1) providing a holistic education, (2) implementing education processes that promote creativity, democracy, and dialogue, (3) ensuring measurability and observability for better education outcomes, (4) maintaining the professionalism of educators and education personnel, (5) providing adequate facilities and infrastructure, (6) empowering education members through the development of educational management, and (7) continuously improving education quality assurance through evaluation, accreditation, and certification (Darda, 2018).

The benchmarking process in Indonesian education follows several steps. Firstly, self-assessment involves formulating an action plan to address problems and reviewing and documenting

the mission and vision of the institution. The Organization of School Accreditation has outlined the minimum components of self-assessment, including curriculum and learning, school administration and management, institutional organization, facilities and infrastructure, personnel, financing, students, community participation, and school culture and environment. Secondly, the comparison is made to identify organizations (schools) that will serve as role models and be the partner school for benchmarking activities. Thirdly, analysis and adaptation involve self-evaluation of the organization (school). Fourthly, planning and implementing necessary actions, communication, and socialization to create and develop member evaluation activities. Lastly, feedback and evaluation are conducted for the benchmarking activity and its achievements (Amat Jaedun, 2011). These benchmarking processes apply to all sectors, including national and Islamic educational institutions.

The logic and processes of benchmarking may seem easy to follow, but there are various types of benchmarking in education. Jackson and Lund (2000) categorized benchmarking into several types, including independent or collaborative, vertical or horizontal, input-output focused, implicit or explicit, internal or external, and quantitative and qualitative approaches. Achtemer and Simpson (2005) recognized benchmarking as process benchmarking, which involves identifying problems and learning from successful formulas of other institutions as role models to bring about outstanding results; metric benchmarking, which involves collecting and comparing data among several institutions using instruments, and goals and milestone benchmarking, which involves identifying internal activities to initiate the process without external activity (self-study). Other categories also mention three types of benchmarking: internal benchmarking or peer-to-peer (P2P) comparison within the same organization, where the institution conducts benchmarking among departments with the same unit (Qassim University, 2019). In education institutions, benchmarking can occur between similar institutions, such as public higher education institutions in the same country, or within the same institution, such as between different *madrasah aliyah*, junior high schools, or senior high schools.

Additionally, external benchmarking or inter-institutional comparison can occur between different institutions. Finally, an institution can conduct self-comparison to compare its performance to previous years to determine progress, decline, or whether the institution has remained unchanged. This strategy is appropriate for setting long-term goals and achieving continuous performance improvement (Kurniawan, 2020).

In addition to the types of benchmarking previously mentioned, the Consortium for Excellence in Higher Education (2003) has identified several other benchmarking types. These include international benchmarking, which encompasses strategic, process, performance, generic, functional, internal, and external benchmarking. Good benchmarking practices can be identified nationally and internationally (Tsiotras, 2017). International benchmarking includes all these types and enables institutions to learn from each other across countries rather than within countries. This approach needs to be explored and developed from the outside but involves higher costs and complexities (OCDE, 1997). Therefore, international benchmarking requires expertise and skills from institutions to achieve progressive results. The Educational Assessment Center (*Pusat Penilaian Pendidikan*) applies international benchmarking to national and Islamic curriculum education in Indonesia. Internal benchmarking is conducted by evaluating eight National Education Standards in Indonesia, including standards, process standard, graduate competency standard, teacher and personnel standard, facilities and infrastructure standard, management standard, finance standard, and education assessment standard (Shalihin & Widodo, 2019) and assessment into Graduate Competency Standards (*Standard Kompetensi Lulusan*) and the external benchmarking based on the international comparison (Amat Jaedun, 2011) into macro variables.

Every educational institution should follow these principles in benchmarking: (1) selecting partners for collaborative activities and improving practices, (2) presenting data, (3) establishing ownership among all participants for improvement, (4) considering benchmarking as an ongoing activity, (5) collecting and integrating data for the best results, and (6) considering worldwide

rankings to gain reputation in the international world view (Tsiotras, 2017). Therefore, quality management (TQM) improvement needs to be controlled by benchmarking with several mentalities that need to be built in the school environment, such as reliability (manners oriented), assurance (school service guarantee), tangibles (school condition in tidiness and cleanliness), empathy (full-service orientation by the school), and responsiveness. As part of TQM, benchmarking should be done step by step in quality assurance (Mustajab, 2015) and focused on best practices-oriented performances, which differ from business sectors (Shonhiwa, 2014).

International Benchmarking in Islamic Education in *Kurikulum Merdeka* within Transdisciplinary Approach

Benchmarking in the Islamic perspective is also known as *uswah* (role model), *muhasabah* (self-evaluation), and *fastabiqul khairat* (be the best). It is considered a sub-system for improving quality assurance, particularly in Islamic education (Billah, 2020). Benchmarking in Islamic education curricula commonly improves the quality and quantity of education. It is a positive and proactive self-evaluation activity that involves continuous comparison with the best or only institutions (Mukhtar et al., 2019). The main objective is to identify, adopt, and apply more effective practices as role models to achieve significant outcomes (Syukri et al., 2019). In brief, benchmarking in Islamic education is established for self-evaluation, reflection, and transformation. This activity can transform the institution by implementing its vision and mission (Sumarto & Harahap, 2019). To enhance the quality of Islamic education in *Kurikulum Merdeka*, adopting an operational-practical mechanism is necessary to ensure its transformation to an international level. In this study, we have developed a local-national-international benchmarking framework for Islamic curriculum education, utilizing Watson's adoption of the fifth generation, which incorporates the transdisciplinary approach. The benchmarking framework includes internal, external, strategic, process, performance, generic, and functional benchmarking, as identified by the Consortium for Excellence in Higher Education (2003) (Tsiotras, 2017).

First, internal benchmarking establishes good organizational practices by comparing internal activities or operations, it includes: (Mukhtar et al., 2019). The first step is to self-evaluate all national education standards, such as content, processes, educators and personnel, graduate competence, facilities, infrastructure, management, financing, and education assessment standards. Secondly, it is necessary to compare with referral institutions. According to UNESCO-CEPES (2007), this activity involves comparing similar projects in different components (Vught et al., 2008). Benchmarking in educational institutions involves conducting a visiting or comparative study of one institution against others. The objective is to evaluate the school's performance by analyzing data to identify performance gaps and compare it to other institutions. This reflective performance analysis aims to determine the advantages and disadvantages of the institution and determine appropriate actions for improvement. The planning and implementation of institutional improvements require careful consideration of the necessary actions, effective communication of alternative ways, and mobilization of support from all stakeholders. Finally, conducting a turnover against the results of benchmarking is essential. This step involves observing and assessing what has been accomplished and the achievements made, commonly known as *muhasabah*.

In summary, benchmarking in educational institutions involves thoroughly evaluating performance gaps and comparing an institution's performance against others. It requires careful planning and implementation of actions needed for improvement, effective communication, mobilization of support from stakeholders, and an evaluation of the achieved results. One implementation of internal benchmarking at the school level is demonstrated by SMKN 1 and SMKN 2 Manokwari, West Papua, with components including school management, schoolwork programs, curriculum development, and extracurricular activities. This benchmarking has been conducted within the internal scope of the schools and between two vocational schools. In addition, benchmarking has been conducted between Islamic schools, such as between MAN 1 Jambi and MAN 1 Malang, in areas such as constructing parking lots for 2-wheeled vehicles, prayer rooms,

new student acceptance, rules for madrasa, improving teacher competence, constructing sports facilities and infrastructure, and enhancing student skills in the field of Islamic music and organization. Internal benchmarking has also been conducted by MAN 1 Batang Hari Jambi with MAN 19 Jakarta and MAN 1 Yogyakarta regarding the quality of graduate education accepted into higher education institutions (Ponco Sudaryanto et al., 2018).

Secondly, external benchmarking enables institutions to compare their functions and critical processes against best practices in other institutions. This form of benchmarking allows institutions to compare themselves in critical areas with rivals or competitors outside the institution (Vught et al., 2008). However, the rivals or competitors referred to in this case are benchmarking conducted through collaboration (Tasopoulou & Tsiotras, 2017) between institutions or schools with different institutional forms. Internal benchmarking exists within an institution, while external benchmarking occurs between several institutions (Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015). Furthermore, internal benchmarking for Islamic education curriculum can be carried out by an institution if there are similar activities, programs, operations, and functions within the same institution (Al-khalifa, 2015), while external benchmarking can be performed on different institutions (non-Islamic institutions or non-Islamic curricula). This can be done by comparing course designs, assessment methods, or student achievements in learning outcomes with a course from another provider (University Australia, 2021). At the institutional level of Islamic education, one example is carried out by IAIN Syekh Nurjati and IAI Bunga Bangsa Cirebon in improving the quality of education through education vision-mission by adopting a general study program with external benchmarking to ITB Cirebon (Asep Kurniawan, 2020). At the school level, one example is carried out by SMA Trensains, which developed the "Unified Curriculum," where there is an integration between the national curriculum and the pesantren curriculum by promoting collaboration between applied sciences and Islamic education (Khusna, 2018; Hermawan, 2017; Kurroti A'yun, Wildanul Fajri, 2018; Muslih, 2018; Shalihin et al., 2019).

Thirdly, strategic benchmarking transforms overall performance, particularly in strategies and processes. Additionally, it is used to compare the actions taken at the strategic level to maintain the institution's competitiveness (Al-khalifa, 2015). Strategic benchmarking aims to use and develop competitor strategies that lead to long-term improvements in the institution. This includes self-evaluation of madrasah programs, comparison with reference madrasahs, reflection on madrasah performance, and feedback on madrasah benchmarking results (Harahap, 2020). Fourth, process benchmarking focuses on specific management processes and procedures, such as enrollment and timetabling. The goal is to improve the efficiency of these specific processes in the institution in the long run (Shahin & Zairi, 2006) by identifying and observing activities (Sekhar, 2010). In this case, Islamic curriculum education changes the process and procedures in modern management, such as enrollment and timetabling. It involves computerized processes and improving people's capabilities in information technology. One example is the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, which updates its management system functions to assess, examine, and provide alternative ideas and programs to achieve their big goals (Hakim et al., 2021).

Fifth, performance benchmarking measures an institution's performance to compare itself with similar institutions. The goal is to create knowledge about competitors to improve the quality of strategic planning. Performance benchmarking instruments can help institutions enhance their performance in this area (Paliulis & Labanauskis, 2015). In this case, Islamic institutions or curriculum education can develop performance metrics to make comparisons across institutions using various models and variables, such as indicators for the performance of Islamic education teachers in developing 21st-century student skills (Yahya & Khalq, 2018).

Sixth, generic benchmarking (best in class) involves examining the processes by which results are achieved (Vught et al., 2008). According to Levy and Ronco (2012), generic benchmarking seeks innovative practices across multiple institutions. The goal of generic benchmarking is to make comparisons with institutions considered the "best" at the process or practice under scrutiny. This

wide-ranging approach looks at the processes by which results are accomplished (Ali Al-Khalifa, 2015; Ruby, 2013b; Scott, 2011). The type of benchmarking is not restricted to any institution (Rashed & Un, 2018), such as conducting benchmarking by visiting other schools once a year (Azis et al., 2013). The seventh type of benchmarking, functional benchmarking, involves comparing a single process (Vught et al., 2008) of an institution with another institution that is not a competitor but shares a standard function. This type of benchmarking aims to identify and improve high-performing processes by focusing on a single program or specific function in an institution recognized as the best performer in similar activities compared to other institutions (Rashed & Un, 2018). Generic and functional benchmarking involves partnerships between institutions from various sectors to improve specific processes or programs. For example, an Islamic-based school may visit universities to learn from their practices.

The last type of benchmarking is international or cross-country comparison, which aligns the level of department, country, or state performance standards with international standards (American Institutes for Research, 2014). The typical type of benchmarking aims to better equip the younger generation with the skills needed worldwide (OECD, 2013). Hence, there are three ways international comparisons can be applied in Islamic institutions based on a transdisciplinary approach; first, by linking national assessment and evaluation of Islamic curriculum education to international tests, such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), and CHEBA (Consortium for Higher Education Benchmarking Analysis), among others. Additionally, Islamic curriculum education needs to develop internationally comparable tests that are coherent and relevant to global standards. Indonesia, for example, has implemented the International Standard School program, which aims to prepare students for global competitiveness (World Bank, 2012). Unfortunately, the International Standard School has been abolished because it is considered contrary to the 1945 Indonesian Constitution and Article 50 Paragraph 3 of Law No. 20 2003, which failed to guarantee education for all (Dharmaningtias, 2013).

Moreover, international assessments and measurements guide student success, enhance networking opportunities for institutions, provide recognition of qualifications, and even allow for competition with other countries (World Bank, 2012). Secondly, setting national targets for Islamic curriculum education to improve the country's score or rank in international assessments can drive economic and national competitiveness. The global economy uses national measurements and international education system performance as a yardstick (Sjøberg, 2018). Last, institutions can set rules to incorporate learning systems from abroad into the national context (Clifton, 2011). The goal is to enable institutions to compete nationally and internationally. Any international benchmarking approach should propose and explore general issues and problems. After that, the institution should conduct monitored and evaluated activities to make them assessable and applicable in other processes, leading the institution to develop best practices towards international benchmarking (OCDE, 1997).

The benefits of international benchmarking in Islamic curriculum education can be grouped into seven categories: First, it provides cultural information that can help overcome the "not found here" and "we are not here" syndrome that often leads to a status quo mentality. Second, it helps identify gaps and problems, leading to performance improvements. Third, it enhances the capabilities of human resources, both in terms of quality and quantity, for better outputs and outcomes. Fourth, it enables institutions to improve their systems to world-class standards. Fifth, it calibrates the difficulty of assessment. Sixth, it gauges the global competitiveness of each country or state. Furthermore, finally, it provides an international metric for state comparison (American Institutes for Research, 2014; Mukhtar et al., 2019). Despite the doubts and criticisms regarding benchmarking's success in management, international benchmarking can lead to progress and bring Islamic education to a worldwide audience within the scope and guidelines of Kurikulum Merdeka.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study reveals that benchmarking is a process aimed at improving the quality and quantity of education, both internally and externally, through collaboration in educational institutions. In contrast to business benchmarking, benchmarking in educational institutions is based on collaboration among school community members. This study recommends adopting Watson's fifth-generation transdisciplinary approach, which includes internal, external, strategic, process, performance, generic, and functional benchmarking, to develop international Islamic education benchmarks under the Kurikulum Merdeka. The study highlights the need for benchmarking to be integrated into Islamic education to improve education quality and compete globally. However, this study is limited by the lack of institutions or schools that have developed benchmarking of Islamic curriculum education based on a comprehensive transdisciplinary approach. Therefore, further research is needed to explore the effectiveness of benchmarking in Islamic education and its impact on education quality and global competitiveness.

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