FULL DAY SCHOOL VS. MODULAR EDUCATION SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF INDONESIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

FULL DAY SCHOOL VS. SISTEM PENDIDIKAN MODULAR: STUDI KOMPARATIF INDONESIA DAN INGGRIS

Ika Kurnia Sofiani [1], Mardiana [2*], Nurlidia Putri[3], Fitri Barokah[4]

[1] Islamic Religious Education Study Program, State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Datuk Laksamana Bengkalis, Email: ikur.wafie@gmail.com

[2] Islamic Religious Education Study Program, State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Datuk Laksamana Bengkalis, Email: mardiananana631@gmail.com

[3] Islamic Religious Education Study Program, State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Datuk Laksamana Bengkalis, Email: nurlidiaptr@gmail.com

[4] Islamic Religious Education Study Program, State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Datuk Laksamana Bengkalis, Email: barokah252004@gmail.com

*email Koresponden: ikur.wafie@gmail.com

Abstract

The transformation of Indonesia's education system faces significant challenges in aligning with the demands of globalization, digitalization, and lifelong learning. These challenges have sparked debates regarding the effectiveness of the full-day school model and the modular education system. This study aims to comparatively analyze these two approaches within the context of primary and secondary education in Indonesia, referencing modular education practices in the United Kingdom as an international benchmark. The study employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review, utilizing thematic content analysis of 20 accredited scholarly sources selected through strict inclusion criteria, and analyzed with the assistance of NVivo software to ensure thematic accuracy. The findings indicate that the full-day school model excels in fostering discipline and consistent learning structures; however, it poses risks of cognitive fatigue and is less supportive of differentiated instruction. In contrast, the modular system offers flexibility, opportunities for personalized learning, and deeper conceptual understanding, yet requires adequate digital infrastructure and self-directed learning literacy, which are not evenly distributed. The study concludes that no single educational model is universally superior; instead, each holds contextual relevance. This research contributes theoretically by enriching the comparative education literature and practically by informing the design of more adaptive, inclusive, and responsive learning policies to meet the challenges of the 21st century, while also supporting efforts to achieve quality education as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords : Full-Day School, Modular System, Learning Effectiveness, Comparative Analysis.

Abstrak

Transformasi sistem pendidikan di Indonesia menghadapi tantangan besar dalam menyelaraskan kebutuhan globalisasi, digitalisasi, dan pembelajaran seumur hidup, yang memunculkan perdebatan mengenai efektivitas model full day school dan sistem pendidikan modular. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara komparatif kedua pendekatan tersebut dalam konteks pendidikan dasar dan menengah di Indonesia, dengan mengaitkan praktik pendidikan modular di Inggris sebagai referensi internasional. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan, dengan teknik analisis isi tematik terhadap 20 sumber ilmiah terakreditasi yang dipilih melalui kriteria inklusi ketat, serta dianalisis menggunakan perangkat bantu NVivo untuk menjaga akurasi tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa full day school unggul dalam menciptakan disiplin dan struktur belajar yang konsisten, namun berisiko menimbulkan kejenuhan kognitif dan kurang mendukung diferensiasi. Sebaliknya, sistem modular memberikan fleksibilitas, ruang personalisasi belajar, dan pemahaman konsep yang lebih dalam, tetapi membutuhkan kesiapan infrastruktur digital dan literasi belajar mandiri yang belum merata. Kesimpulan dari studi ini menegaskan bahwa tidak ada satu model pendidikan yang superior secara mutlak, melainkan keduanya memiliki relevansi kontekstual masing-masing. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dalam memperkaya literatur komparatif pendidikan dan kontribusi praktis dalam merancang kebijakan pembelajaran yang lebih adaptif, inklusif, dan responsif terhadap tantangan abad ke-21, sekaligus mendukung upaya pencapaian pendidikan berkualitas sebagaimana tercantum dalam tujuan pembangunan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci : Full Day School, Sistem Modular, Efektivitas Pembelajaran, Analisis Komparatif.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education system continues to undergo significant transformations in response to the demands of globalization, digitalization, and the need for sustainable learning. Two educational models that have recently emerged as focal points of discourse are the full-day school and the modular education system. The full-day school model emphasizes extended, structured learning hours within formal school settings, whereas the modular system offers greater flexibility, prioritizing competency-based learning and differentiation according to students' learning pace.

According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek,* 2024) approximately 31% of primary schools in major urban areas have adopted the full-day school model. However, the implementation of the modular system has seen a rise under the Merdeka Curriculum policy, especially at the lower and upper secondary levels (DWI, 2024)This trend reflects a growing interest in more contextual and individualized learning models, in line with the increasing demand for lifelong learning (Reynolds dkk., 2014)

Nonetheless, debates persist regarding the effectiveness of these two approaches in improving learning outcomes, character development, and students' readiness to face global challenges. A study by (Apriyani dkk., 2018) indicates that students in full-day school settings

tend to maintain stable academic performance but often experience learning fatigue. In contrast (Asmuni, 2024)that implementing the modular system under the Merdeka Curriculum enhances students' intrinsic motivation, although inconsistencies in implementation across schools remain a challenge. This divergence in perceptions highlights the need for a more comprehensive empirical inquiry into the pedagogical, psychological, and social dimensions of both approaches.

The current body of literature reveals a scarcity of comparative studies that directly analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the full-day school versus the modular education system, particularly within the Indonesian or Southeast Asian context. Most research remains focused on evaluating each model in isolation (Yuliana, 2021) (Akbar, 2024) with few theoretical syntheses comparing the pedagogical implications, time management structures, and student well-being across both systems. This has created a notable research gap, especially in addressing the question of which educational model is more adaptive to evolving social, technological, and individual student needs in the post-pandemic era.

Globally, the United Kingdom has long implemented a modular approach at the secondary and tertiary levels, notably through the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and A-level systems, which allow students to select and delve into subjects based on personal interest. In contrast, Indonesia has only recently introduced the modular system via the Merdeka Curriculum, and disparities in institutional readiness and teacher capacity remain significant challenges. A study by (Saragih, 2025)revealed that the modular approach in the UK fosters high levels of learning personalization, but it also demands strong self-directed learning skills—an expectation that may not yet be feasible in Indonesia due to disparities in digital literacy and pedagogical preparedness(Nur Faliza dkk., 2025).

The objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the full-day school and modular education systems within the context of primary and secondary education in Indonesia, incorporating lessons from the UK's implementation of similar systems. This research will evaluate the effectiveness of both models based on indicators such as academic performance, character development, curriculum flexibility, and impacts on student well-being. Through both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the study will also assess how well these models align with 21st-century learning principles and support SDG 4 targets for quality education.

The theoretical contribution of this research is expected to enrich the literature on curriculum design and pedagogical innovation, particularly in developing countries. By comparing two philosophically and structurally distinct models, this study offers a fresh perspective on understanding the complexities of modern education systems. In practical terms, the findings may serve as a vital reference for policymakers, school principals, and educators in designing learning strategies that are more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable, tailored to the local contexts of individual schools

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach based on library research, with content analysis and thematic synthesis as its primary strategies. Library research was selected to allow

for an in-depth and critical examination of a wide range of scholarly sources discussing the full-day school model and the modular education system, both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. This type of research is particularly relevant for comparing theories and findings across different national contexts—especially between Indonesia and the United Kingdom—within the framework of policy analysis and curriculum design. The approach supports the development of a comprehensive conceptual framework through the systematic exploration of recent scholarly literature (Prayudi dkk., 2023)

The data sources for this research consist of secondary literature obtained from national and international academic databases, such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, DOAJ, and Garuda (Assyakurrohim dkk., 2022). The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, scholarly books, and policy reports published between 2020 and 2024, written in either Indonesian or English, and directly or indirectly addressing full-day school and/or modular systems. Sources that were not peer-reviewed, represented personal opinions, or were derived from blogs and popular media were excluded from the analysis (exclusion criteria).

Data collection was conducted through a systematic search using keywords such as "full day school," "modular education system," "curriculum policy," "Kurikulum Merdeka," and "comparative education Indonesia and UK." Each identified article or source was documented using the Zotero reference management tool and evaluated for relevance based on its abstract and keywords. Selected literature was then analyzed and classified into key themes such as curriculum design, learning flexibility, student motivation, and educational effectiveness.

The research procedure consisted of several stages, beginning with problem identification and formulation of research objectives, followed by designing a data search strategy, literature retrieval and selection, thematic data categorization, and finally the writing of a narrative synthesis. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation—comparing information across different types of documents and geographical contexts (Indonesia and the UK). Additionally, peer debriefing with fellow education researchers was conducted to test the interpretation of findings and minimize subjective bias.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis. Each relevant text was manually coded to identify main themes, subthemes, and interrelated concepts. The results were visualized in the form of comparative matrices between countries and between educational approaches, enabling readers to observe patterns of strengths and weaknesses in each system more explicitly. To ensure accuracy and consistency in data processing, NVivo 14 software was used as a qualitative analysis tool.

Through this approach, the study aims to produce a theoretical contribution in the form of a conceptual map that integrates findings from various studies on full-day school and modular systems, while comparing their application in two countries with differing educational system characteristics. The findings may also serve as a conceptual reference for policymakers and education practitioners in evaluating and designing more contextual, flexible, and responsive learning models that meet the needs of 21st-century learners.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identifies four main findings based on a synthesis of 20 accredited scholarly articles, namely: (1) learning effectiveness, (2) curriculum flexibility, (3) student well-being, and (4) readiness for 21st-century challenges. Each theme is explored through recent studies conducted in Indonesia and the UK, which offer differing yet comparable approaches to educational policy.

Learning Effectiveness

Learning effectiveness refers to the extent to which educational processes succeed in achieving instructional goals—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor—consistently and equitably among learners. In the full day school system, effectiveness is often associated with the advantages of structured learning, academic supervision by the school, and prolonged direct interaction between teachers and students. A synthesis of various studies indicates that this model tends to foster academic discipline and consistent learning structures (Asmuni, 2024) The teacher's presence throughout the day in a formal learning environment creates a tight monitoring system, which theoretically supports the development of routines and long-term study habits.

However, this effectiveness becomes relative when not balanced with adaptive teaching approaches that address individual differences. Many students experience academic pressure due to tightly packed schedules, a one-size-fits-all approach, and limited space for personal exploration. According to (Alimni dkk., 2021)overly dense learning models risk cognitive fatigue and reduced intrinsic student motivation. The lack of time for reflection, active rest, and differentiated learning methods weakens long-term information retention.

Conversely, the modular system offers a different paradigm, prioritizing self-paced learning and interest-based instruction. In this model, students have the flexibility to complete units or learning modules within adjustable timeframes, with an emphasis on deep conceptual understanding rather than merely completing material within a fixed timeframe ((Septikasari dkk., 2024) This aligns with Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, which highlights the need for optimal intervention spaces between independent learning potential and instructional support from teachers or learning resources

A study by (Tuanany, 2022) in the UK confirms that the strength of the modular system lies in its ability to foster deep conceptual understanding and empower students to design their own learning strategies. In the context of 21st-century education, this model supports the development of metacognitive awareness—students' awareness of their thinking processes and learning strategies. However, the effectiveness of this system heavily depends on two critical factors: (1) students' self-directed learning literacy, and (2) access to digital learning infrastructure and technology support. Without these components, modular systems may fail in implementation and widen learning disparities.

These findings also reflect a critical contrast between the two models, particularly in relation to educational sociocultural contexts. In countries like Indonesia, where education tends to be hierarchical and teacher-centered, the modular system requires a learning culture transformation that is not easily achieved in the short term. On the other hand, full day schools—though socially well-established—often fall short in offering intellectual challenges that match the evolving demands and digital-native traits of today's learners.

Table 1. Comparison of Academic Effectiveness Between the Two Systems

Education System	Academic Strengths	Academic Weaknesses
Full Day School	High discipline, structured environment	Risk of burnout, lack of differentiation, heavy workload
Modular System	Deep understanding, flexible pacing	Self-regulation disparities, reliance on technology and teacher readiness

Thus, the learning effectiveness of each model cannot be evaluated in absolute terms but must be contextualized within sociopedagogical environments, infrastructure readiness, and learner characteristics. The full day model is more suitable for contexts demanding structural discipline and close supervision, whereas the modular system is ideal for learning environments that promote student autonomy, digital engagement, and high learning literacy. In practice, a hybrid approach may provide the most adaptive solution for modern learning demands (Ningsih & Hidayat, 2022).

Curriculum Flexibility and Implementation

Curriculum flexibility is one of the primary distinguishing elements between modular education and full day school models (Pebriana, 2025a). In Indonesia, modular systems have been systematically integrated through the *Kurikulum Merdeka* policy, which emphasizes differentiated learning, project-based education, and alignment with the *Pancasila Student Profile*. This system allows students to learn according to their interests, needs, and individual pace, thereby theoretically supporting progressive and constructivist pedagogical principles(Setyawan dkk., 2021)

However, research shows that the implementation of curriculum flexibility via the modular system is not yet evenly distributed or optimally executed across Indonesia. Dwi (2024) notes that urban schools with adequate technological access and strong human resource support are better equipped to develop adaptive, context-sensitive learning modules. In contrast, schools in remote areas struggle to develop locally relevant modules due to insufficient curriculum training, lack of digital learning materials, and limited capacity to use ICT tools. This underscores the fact that curriculum flexibility in practice is highly dependent on a school's internal resource readiness.

Further challenges in implementing modular systems are also seen in time management, formative assessments, and cross-disciplinary integration. Learning modules, when designed in a fragmented manner, may be difficult to holistically integrate without strong coordination among teachers and curriculum understanding at the school level. Many educators are still accustomed to the linear and integrated approaches from the 2013 Curriculum, making the transition to modular curriculum a paradigm shift that requires time and sustained professional support(*Kemendikbudristek - Yahoo Hasil Pencarian*, 2024)

By contrast, the UK has practiced modular education for over two decades, particularly through the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) and A-Level structures, which are competency-based and unit-based. Students have the freedom to choose subject combinations aligned with their interests and career goals, with flexible assessment formats often based on portfolios or project-based tasks. This model supports personalized learning pathways and allows learners to repeat or adjust modules without restarting an entire academic year—something difficult to implement in full day schools with fixed academic calendars.

The key difference between Indonesia and the UK lies in systemic governance and structural readiness. In the UK, module development and distribution are supported by national certification bodies such as Pearson Edexcel and Cambridge Assessment, which provide precise standards for content, cognitive levels, and assessments. In Indonesia, modules are still decentralized and depend on individual teacher or school initiatives, resulting in wide variations in quality and relevance—even though national regulations have already outlined the guiding principles.

Therefore, curriculum flexibility through modular systems will only be effective when supported by responsive national policies, ongoing teacher training, and robust digital infrastructure. Without these, the intended flexibility may instead generate new inequities in access and quality of education, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, developing inclusive and adaptive modular systems is both a major challenge and a strategic opportunity for Indonesia's educational reform.

Student Well-being and Work-Life Balance

Research indicates that the full day school model is often criticized for its negative impact on students' time balance—particularly regarding time for play, family interaction, and mental health (Pebriana, 2025)Meanwhile, the modular system is considered more student-friendly in terms of well-being, as it allows for more flexible time management, although it also requires more mature self-regulation from students. In the UK, this balance is supported by an integrated pastoral care policy within the modular system (Kinanti dkk., 2023).

Readiness for 21st-Century Learning

Globally, the modular system is more closely aligned with 21st-century learning approaches such as critical thinking, collaboration, and digital technology integration. Parmaxi et al. (2024) conclude that digital module development and problem-based learning are more

compatible with modular structures than with the dense, uniform full day school model. Indonesia is still in a transitional phase toward a fully competency-based modular system, whereas the UK has structurally implemented this model for over two decades.

Most previous studies in Indonesia (Utaminingsih & Wuriningsih, 2025; Dwi, 2024) have evaluated full day school and modular systems separately without placing them side by side in a unified comparative framework. This study contributes to the scholarly literature by presenting a systematic cross-national comparison of the two models—something rarely found in Indonesian academic discourse. Therefore, these findings offer an original contribution to building a contextual education discourse that is globally oriented yet sensitive to local realities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both the full day school system and the modular education system have their own strengths and limitations, which are highly dependent on the context of their implementation. Full day school excels in fostering academic discipline and consistent learning structures through intensive teacher supervision, but it carries the risk of learning fatigue and provides limited space for differentiation. In contrast, the modular system offers flexibility, deeper conceptual understanding, and high levels of personalized learning, yet it demands well-prepared teachers, student autonomy, and adequate digital infrastructure.

In terms of learning effectiveness, the full day model is more suitable for contexts that require strong structure and tight instructional control, while the modular system is ideal for promoting student autonomy, digital literacy, and 21st-century skill development. Regarding curriculum flexibility, the modular system allows adaptation to students' interests and learning pace; however, its implementation in Indonesia still faces challenges such as unequal resource distribution and limited teacher readiness. Student well-being is better maintained within the modular system, as it offers greater control over learning time, whereas the full day school model tends to disrupt children's life balance.

A comparison with the system in the United Kingdom highlights that the success of the modular model relies heavily on systemic readiness, policy support, and a strong learning culture. Therefore, adapting the modular system in Indonesia must be done gradually and systematically, taking into account the capacity of schools and the preparedness of the broader educational ecosystem.

Overall, no single system is entirely superior; what is needed is a hybrid approach that combines the structured discipline of the full day school with the flexibility and personalization of the modular system. Hence, education reform in Indonesia should focus on building an inclusive, contextualized, and adaptive learning system that responds to the challenges of the 21st century—aligned with the vision of SDG 4 for quality education for all.

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