



A Comparative Study in Final Project Implementation of Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract: This study explores the implementation of final projects in higher education systems in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam to understand their role in shaping the student learning experience. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis, followed by data condensation, presentation, and conclusion drawing. The findings highlight how academic policies shape the forms and expectations of final projects. In Indonesia, undergraduate final projects are predominantly in the form of theses, while alternatives such as prototypes and projects are emerging depending on institutional policies. Master's and doctoral programs typically involve theses or dissertations. In Brunei, institutions adopt varied approaches: internships at KUPU SB and theses at UNISSA are common for undergraduates, with master's and doctoral programs offering flexibility between research-based theses and coursework. This study concludes that academic frameworks significantly influence student learning dynamics and outcomes. It contributes to educational research by providing insights into the relationship between institutional practices and higher education learning experiences.

Keywords: Brunei Darussalam; Final Project; Indonesia; KUPU; UNISSA

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education is a fundamental foundation for building excellent and competitive human resources. At the final stage of this formal education process, individuals are equipped with crucial knowledge and skills to contribute to societal progress (Alawiyah, 2011). Beyond mere mastery of theory, higher education focuses on developing applicative abilities to turn learners into members of society with academic and professional competence (Raitskaya, 2019). Higher education can potentially have the fastest impact on building human resources. Universities must independently innovate quickly according to the students' needs, competencies, interests, and talents of their lecturers (Sihite et al., 2019). This effort is further emphasized in higher education through more specific and in-depth programs. Students are encouraged to apply, develop, and create knowledge, technology, and arts in real-world contexts. One way to measure student achievement at this level is through a final project (Santoso et al., 2023).

The final project is a significant milestone in a student's academic journey towards obtaining a degree. It's crucial role is assessing the students' competence and capability to apply their acquired knowledge (Suwita, 2020). Through research or projects relevant to their field of study, students are required to collect data, conduct in-depth analyses, and draw conclusions that make tangible contributions to advancing knowledge and practice in their field (Muspawati et al., 2020). More than just an academic project, the final project serves as a stepping stone for students to develop essential skills, such as critical, analytical, and creative thinking (Tafahomi et al., 2024). These abilities become valuable assets for them in facing various challenges in the professional world, enabling them to become competent, innovative individuals ready to contribute to progress in their field.

The final project is a primary assessment instrument in higher education, determining student graduation, the quality of graduates produced, and the university's reputation. The results of the final project are not merely academic documents but also reflections of the quality of education the students have received throughout their studies. The output of the final project has several important dimensions (Radović et al., 2021). Firstly, from an academic perspective, the final project demonstrates how students can integrate and apply the theories they have learned. Secondly, from a practical standpoint, the final project often offers innovative solutions to real-world problems, making it a valuable reference for the industry or related fields (Steiner & Posch, 2015). The final project is a portfolio showcasing students' abilities to conduct complex research or projects (Rizal et al., 2023). Nowadays, the form of final projects varies widely. The policies of each campus and study program greatly influence the assessment methods used. Domestically and internationally, evaluating student final projects shows significant variations influenced by culture, educational policies, and the assessment

systems in place (Curaj et al., 2018). Each country has a unique approach to evaluating student final projects, reflecting its cultural values and national priorities. Educational policies set by the government play an essential role in determining the standards and procedures for assessment. Additionally, the assessment systems implemented by higher education institutions, including evaluation methods and grading criteria, significantly impact how final projects are assessed and received (Arar et al., 2019).

As neighboring Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam have significant differences, one of which is their education systems. Brunei Darussalam bases its education system on SPN21 and the Brunei Vision 2035, aiming to achieve the highest international standards in education (Ebil & Shahrill, 2023). Through SPN21, the Ministry of Education of Brunei Darussalam prioritizes the development of 21st-century skills among students, aligning with contemporary needs and future anticipations. This system also aims to strengthen desired values and attitudes, aligning with the Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) concept as the national philosophy (Fadil et al., 2023).

On the other hand, education in Indonesia encompasses all forms of educational delivery, both structured and unstructured. Structurally, the responsibility for education in Indonesia falls under the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Sukmayadi & Yahya, 2020). Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System divides Indonesian education into three main pathways: formal, non-formal, and informal, which are grouped into four levels: early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education (Abduh, 2016). Unlike the education system in Indonesia, the government of Brunei establishes three main areas in education: the bilingual system in schools, the concept of Melayu Islam Beraja in the school curriculum, and the enhancement of human resources, including vocational and technical education (Yahya & Sa'ari, 2015).

Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam are firmly committed to enhancing the quality of higher education, which plays a crucial role in developing globally competitive and skilled human resources (Sakri et al., 2024). Both countries recognize that higher education should focus on mastering theories and developing applicative skills and critical thinking abilities. Initial observations indicate significant differences in how student final projects are completed as assessments of integration and application of learned knowledge (Maureen & Choirunnisa, 2020). Acknowledging the importance of final projects, previous research has emphasized the crucial role of these projects in ensuring optimal academic experiences. However, managing these projects is complex due to staff workload, student preferences, and efficient allocation of resources (Yong & Salleh, 2023).

Other studies also highlight the importance of administration in educational institutions to improve overall education quality and support student academic experiences. Students must navigate various administrative processes and procedures when completing their final projects (Mawudeku & Ankumah, 2021). The primary goal of these processes is to ensure that the final projects proceed smoothly and provide a satisfying academic experience for students (Yong & Salleh, 2023). However, there is still a lack of studies that specifically compare the implementation of final projects between higher education institutions in different countries, particularly within Islamic universities in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Research has yet to comprehensively analyze differences in assessment criteria, institutional policies, and the factors influencing these variations in the context of Islamic higher education. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by comparing the implementation of final projects in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam, specifically at Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) and Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB). Through in-depth analysis, we will explore differences in approaches, criteria, and assessment practices between the two countries and identify the factors influencing these differences. This study highlights best practices that can enhance final project management and academic evaluation in Islamic higher education institutions by identifying these variations. Additionally, this research will contribute to a better understanding of how different administrative and educational policies impact student academic experiences, offering valuable insights for future improvements.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a comparative approach to identify the similarities and differences in the implementation of final projects at UIN Sunan Kalijaga (Indonesia), Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), and Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) in Brunei Darussalam. This approach systematically analyzes each institution's procedures, ideas, and academic policy perspectives (Febrian, 2023). The research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the role of institutional policies in shaping students' learning experiences and supporting curriculum development in higher education.

The study participants include undergraduate and postgraduate students from the three universities and lecturers and administrators involved in policy-making and the implementation of final projects. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that the data obtained reflects relevant experiences and perspectives. This approach provides broader insights into academic practices and the differences in policies within the higher education systems of Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam. Data were collected through three primary techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted

to directly understand the implementation of final projects in each academic setting. Semi-structured interviews explored students' experiences, challenges, motivations, and practices in completing their final projects (Alaslan & Saumlaki, 2022). Documentation included an analysis of institutional guidelines, supporting literature, and academic documents, with the data categorized into primary data (directly from participants) and secondary data (books, articles, and institutional documents).

Data analysis was conducted using the model by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation was done by filtering and simplifying information to group it into relevant categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The condensed data were systematically presented through tables, diagrams, or emerging themes. Conclusions were drawn based on identified patterns, institutional comparisons, and the policy implications for students' learning. This rigorous technique ensures that the research findings are valid and relevant and contribute significantly to academic understanding in multicultural higher education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The undergraduate final project in Indonesia is known as a "skripsi." The term "skripsi" originates from Dutch colonial tradition, where "schriftelijke" means "written." A skripsi is generally considered a scholarly written work of moderate depth and research complexity, focusing on applying learned theories and methodologies to solve specific problems (Amalia et al., 2023). Obtaining a Bachelor's degree (S1) from any university, whether public or private, in Indonesia is required. To obtain a Master's or Doctoral degree, students must write a thesis and a dissertation, respectively (Fadhil & Sabic-El-Rayess, 2021). A thesis is a scholarly written work prepared by Master's (postgraduate) students as a graduation requirement. Meanwhile, a dissertation is a scholarly written work prepared by doctoral (PhD) students as a graduation requirement, holding a higher status than a skripsi and thesis (Susanti et al., 2017).

The final project and skripsi are scholarly works that undergraduate students (Sarjana Strata Satu/S1) must complete as university graduation requirements, addressing specific issues using scientific methods (Ernawati, 2010). The term "final project" generally refers to the requirement for Diploma students, while "skripsi" is used for Bachelor's degree students. Overall, before becoming alums, students must complete a final project as a skripsi, which is still known by that term today. In Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system, higher education institutions must implement the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, which includes education, research, and community service to enhance the nation's intellectual life (Harianto, 2021). Universities must provide higher education to students, equipping them with the skills, knowledge, and understanding necessary for their professional lives. Additionally, universities must conduct research and development to advance science and technology, create solutions for societal issues, and contribute meaningfully through programs and activities that address social problems and build partnerships and collaborations with various stakeholders (Abo-Khalil, 2024).

Furthermore, Brunei Darussalam, as a member of the Commonwealth, has adopted many educational principles from the United Kingdom. English has become the second international language after Malay in Brunei (Wasiah, 2022). According to the data obtained by researchers, one significant difference is the term "thesis" for the final project, as opposed to "skripsi," commonly used in Indonesia. In Brunei Darussalam, the term "thesis" is used not only for the Master's level but also for the Bachelor's level, which they refer to as the degree level. Like in Indonesia, a dissertation remains the final doctoral or PhD project. The Brunei government's education system encompasses three main areas: the bilingual system in schools, the Melayu Islam Beraja concept in the curriculum, and the enhancement of human resources, including vocational and technical education (Abdul et al., 2021). This education system shares similarities with other Commonwealth countries, such as the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and Singapore (Hidayat et al., 2023).

The education system in Brunei is known for its A7-3-2-2 structure, which outlines the duration of study at each level: 7 years at the primary level, 3 years at lower secondary, 2 years at upper secondary, and 2 years at pre-university (Ebil & Shahrill, 2024). According to the data gathered, the education system in Brunei Darussalam consists of several stages, starting from O'Level Cambridge (equivalent to high school level), Pre-University, up to the degree (Bachelor's), master's, and PhD levels (Tibok & Hiew, 2019). Before progressing to university, students must complete the Pre-University program, which includes STPUB for Arabic Language majors, A'Level for English Language majors, or diploma/HND as alternatives.

Unlike Indonesia, Brunei Darussalam has an education system that requires prospective university students to undergo a Pre-University program before entering university (Pitriyati & Noviani, 2023). This program is integral to Brunei's education system, ensuring consistency and high educational standards. According to the source, prospective students in Brunei must undertake the Pre-University program for two years before entering the university phase (Muhammad & Bakar, 2013). This program is designed to provide a solid foundation in various fields of knowledge, supporting students as they enter higher education (Guo et al., 2020). Additionally, the Pre-University period is an important transitional stage for students towards higher

education. During this program, students begin to choose specializations in their fields of interest, allowing them to deepen their understanding in those areas. The program also provides practical experiences such as short research projects and presentations, helping students prepare for the academic challenges in university (Wilson et al., 2016). Overall, the two-year Pre-University program is a crucial stage for prospective students in Brunei before they can enroll in their chosen universities. It is an essential step to ensure students' academic and practical readiness for success in higher education. The Pre-University program is typically conducted at the sixth-form level, equivalent to the final year of high school.

Final Project Forms in Indonesia

Based on the data obtained, the researcher has studied final projects in Indonesia, focusing on Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga and several other universities. This information was gathered from various sources that provided insights into the transformation in implementing final projects in higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Table 1. Final Project Forms of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga and Several Others Universities in Indonesia

University	Level	Final Project Forms
Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga	Bachelor	Skripsi
	Master	Tesis
	PhD/Doctoral	Disertasi
Several Universities in Indonesia	Bachelor Master PhD/Doctoral	They have policies that allow final projects to take various forms besides theses and dissertations, such as prototypes or other project-based formats.

In Indonesia, the thesis remains the primary form of final scholarly work. The thesis is often discussed regarding its necessity as a final project and the difficulty, complexity, and numerous requirements that must be met as a condition for graduation from the university (Puspita, 2019). As presented by the researcher in Table 1, at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga and several other universities, the thesis is the final project for undergraduate students and applies to all faculties without exception. To obtain a master's degree, students must complete a thesis as their final project, while doctoral programs require the completion of a dissertation. However, the trend is beginning to change in response to societal needs and the development of the times. History, tradition, educational standards, accessibility, resources, labor market demands, and perceptions of academic culture influence this change.

According to the Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, final projects can be prototypes, projects, or other formats beyond the traditional thesis or dissertation. This decision depends on the policies of each higher education institution that implements a project-based curriculum (Sholeh & Fathurro'uf, 2023). However, master's and doctoral programs generally still require a final project, although publishing it in a journal is not mandatory. This transformation provides an opportunity for academic programs to determine the format of final projects and remove this requirement in many undergraduate programs, encouraging universities to implement the Kampus Merdeka initiative and innovation in the implementation of the Tridharma of higher education (Basra et al., 2024). The Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation No. 53 of 2023 expands the options for final projects, including prototypes, projects, and similar formats, which were previously limited to theses, dissertations, and research papers (Sholeh & Fathurro'uf, 2023). This regulation provides flexibility for universities with autonomous systems regulating final projects across various disciplines and programs, allowing students to choose projects according to their interests (Rizqiyah et al., 2023). This is further reinforced by the fact that undergraduate students now have the option to replace their thesis with a scientific journal publication (Ma'ruf & Fitria, 2021). The main difference lies in the length; a thesis typically covers 60 to 70 pages, while a scientific journal requires about 15 to 20 pages. Despite being more concise, scientific journals still maintain a high level of depth and complexity. This equivalency program requires students to produce scientific articles published in nationally accredited journals, in accordance with the policies of each program.

Final Project Forms in Brunei Darussalam

Based on the data collected regarding the forms of final projects or theses in Brunei Darussalam, information was gathered from two higher education institutions: Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali. Interviews with local sources revealed differences in the implementation of final project formats between Brunei Darussalam and Indonesia at the undergraduate, Master's, and doctoral levels.

Table 2. Final Project Forms of Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali in Brunei Darussalam

University	Level	Final Project Forms
Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB)	Bachelor	Internship
	Master	Thesis by Research and Coursework
	PhD/Doctoral	Dissertation by Research and Coursework
Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali	Bachelor (All Faculties except Arabic)	Thesis
	Master	Thesis through Research, Coursework-based, and Combined Coursework and Dissertation.
	PhD/Doctoral	By Research

Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB)

Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB) focuses on teacher education and training. KUPU SB aims to produce high-quality teachers as an institution emphasizing education and teaching. Graduates of KUPU SB are expected to be capable of teaching effectively and correctly, which aligns with the university's vision and mission. Based on Table 2, all study programs at Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB), especially at the undergraduate level (Degree), do not require students to write a thesis as their final project. Instead, they must undergo an internship program in schools for approximately three months, typically conducted in the second, third, and fourth years. Internships are crucial in transforming engineering interns into fully prepared professionals (Prabhu & S., 2016).

The internship program not only provides an opportunity for students to gain experience in teaching but also enables them to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world educational settings. Students can develop key skills such as communication, adaptability, and problem-solving by engaging directly with students, observing classroom dynamics, and interacting with seasoned educators. These competencies are essential for becoming effective and confident educators. Moreover, the program fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges and rewards of teaching, which helps students refine their teaching philosophy and approach. In this way, the internship is an essential bridge between academic learning and professional practice, preparing graduates to enter the workforce with the knowledge and practical experience needed to succeed (Sapargaliyeva et al., 2023).

This internship program replaces the traditional thesis or final project required to complete university studies. Evaluation in the internship program includes attitudes and behaviors during teaching activities and students' ability to effectively and appropriately apply teaching methods. Students who fail in the internship program may be required to repeat it. In Indonesia, the difference lies in the integration of internship programs as part of specific courses, often referred to as Micro Teaching, while the thesis remains a mandatory final task (Azrai et al., 2020).

For Master's and PhD students at Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan in Brunei Darussalam, completing a final project according to their level of study remains mandatory. The Master's program involves the preparation of a thesis, while for the PhD program, students produce a dissertation. Interestingly, KUPU SB offers two options for Master's and PhD programs: By Research and Coursework, providing flexibility to students. The Research program directs students to focus entirely on thesis writing, involving a thesis defense or final examination, with a minimum requirement of 60,000 words. The Coursework program allows students to attend lectures in the first year and prepare a thesis in the second year, with a thesis of at least 30,000 words. The thesis in the Coursework program does not involve an examination or defense.

Notably, no plagiarism detection system like Turnitin has been applied in either of these programs. The main difference between a thesis and a dissertation lies in the scale or length of the text. The thesis writing standards at KUPU SB follow guidelines applicable in the UK and Malaysia, emphasizing a mixed methods approach in research. Based on the gathered information, selecting the Research and Coursework programs at Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan requires meeting specific criteria. To qualify for the Research program, students must be graduates of KUPU SB with a minimum GPA of 3.5 and have proficient skills in the Arabic language. This program is not available to graduates from outside KUPU SB. On the other hand, the coursework program mandates students to undergo a three-month internship. Choosing the By Research program does not require participation in an internship, as students opting for this track generally have had internship experiences during their undergraduate education at KUPU SB.

In the context of thesis or dissertation writing at KUPU SB, it is crucial to consider an education approach centered around religion, as regulated by KUPU SB's educational framework. Therefore, thesis or dissertation titles must be relevant to education and reference the Sultan's decree. Given Brunei's governance system led by the Sultan, research in the thesis must reflect significant objectives outlined in the Sultan's decree, which is an integral aspect of the country.

The thesis writing process at KUPU SB can be conducted in Arabic, English, Malay, or Jawi, depending on the student's proficiency. Students proficient in Jawi will receive additional assessment because it

demonstrates high proficiency in that language. Jawi language proficiency applies not only to thesis writing but also to presentations and final examinations. This is because Jawi is considered difficult, and its use is often poorly understood. Thus students mastering it well have a significant advantage (Ramala, 2020). Along with the development of coursework-based Master's programs, which have become the main path for continuing education in various professions, this program provides opportunities for students to enhance their knowledge through a more applied approach, as well as develop research skills as part of the thesis completion process (Drennan & Clarke, 2015).

Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA)

Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA) in Brunei, at the undergraduate level, is a degree and involves completing a final project as a thesis. While the thesis completion procedure is similar to that in Indonesia, there are significant differences in the final assessment process. At UNISSA, there is no thesis defense as commonly practiced in Indonesia. Instead, assessment is conducted by submitting the thesis to the supervisor and examiner without a face-to-face examination. This procedure applies to all study programs at UNISSA, except for the Faculty of Arabic Language.

In the Faculty of Arabic Language at UNISSA, completing the undergraduate thesis in Arabic Language Education involves creating two storybooks in Arabic and Malay. Each storybook must consist of 40 pages with various exercises and is prepared as a group project. This thesis is a mandatory requirement and involves three courses that must be taken, including Quranic studies, textual comprehension, and hadith translation. Evaluation criteria for the thesis include the originality of the theme, appropriate font size according to faculty policy, correct spelling, good grammar, cohesive plot, and effective teaching approach for both children and adult audiences. These storybooks may potentially be considered for publication.

The thesis does not undergo a defense because the intensive guidance provided from the beginning is deemed sufficient, and due to the creative nature of this final project, it does not require a final examination. Groups consist of four individuals who choose to collaborate, with two responsible for one storybook, each in Arabic and Malay. The length of the stories may vary as long as they reach 40 pages.

As the sources explain, the thesis as a final project is considered more beneficial because it allows students to directly apply the theories they have learned in a practical context. The focus on developing skills and theoretical understanding during studies is a key advantage of the thesis. On the other hand, alternative approaches, such as creating storybooks in Arabic and Malay, are also deemed interesting and can enhance students' writing skills. Despite its challenges, this approach is valued for producing scholarly works that the general public can appreciate.

At the Master's level at Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali, there are three available forms of completing the final project. This approach is open to both internal and external alums. Prospective students must submit a research proposal based on a specific theme. The application process involves filling out forms and briefly describing the research proposal. If the proposal is accepted, prospective students will be contacted by the university administration for official registration. During Semester 1, students will take classes such as research methodology and other courses relevant to their chosen field of study. By Semester 4, the completed research will be submitted in preparation for the final examination.

This approach focuses solely on coursework without a thesis requirement. Students will complete classes within the specified curriculum until graduation without thesis requirements. There may be policies in some faculties that require students to write several scientific articles without emphasizing a thesis topic. This approach combines elements of the previous two methods. During Semesters 1 and 2, students will attend theory and research methodology classes, focusing on preparing a thesis topic to be chosen by the end of Semester 2. Once the thesis title is finalized and a supervisor selected, students will focus on writing the thesis during Semesters 3 and 4. The thesis will be submitted for examination mid-Semester 4, with potential revisions based on evaluation outcomes. In doctoral programs, the final project consists solely of the Research method, involving complete dissertation writing. The process begins with submitting a dissertation proposal, where students are expected to propose a suitable and relevant research topic. After the proposal is approved, students typically begin writing the dissertation without a regular class schedule. This process leads to a dissertation defense or examination to assess students' profound understanding of their research topic. Each approach offers different advantages and requirements tailored to prospective students' academic interests and needs.

CONCLUSION

Higher education is crucial in developing skilled individuals who can contribute to societal progress. The final project is a key stage in evaluating students' ability to apply theoretical knowledge practically. A comparison of final project implementation in Indonesia and Brunei Darussalam reveals different approaches. In Indonesia, undergraduate theses remain central, but there is a growing trend toward alternative formats like projects for advanced programs. The thesis is key in Brunei, especially at Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA), with a strong focus on internships at Kolej Universiti Perguruan Ugama Seri Begawan (KUPU SB). Both countries also offer research-based theses or coursework for master's and doctoral programs. These differences reflect the adaptation to local educational needs and policies, providing insights into diverse academic practices. These variations impact students' learning experiences, shaping their ability to apply knowledge and contribute to society. Understanding these differences can improve educational policies, encourage institutional collaboration, and provide students with a broader range of learning experiences that meet global and local needs. This research contributes to the educational community by offering new insights on final project strategies, teaching methods, and comparative education systems in Southeast Asia.

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