



## The Growth of Islamic Schools in Singkawang in the Colonial Era

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe the development of Islamic schools in Singkawang during the Dutch East Indies colonial era (1901-1942). This era was marked by the transformation of Islamic education from traditional to formal, which was driven by the need to integrate general subjects. Interestingly, Islamic schools were able to exist amidst the rapid growth of Catholic Mission schools and the dominance of the Chinese community in Singkawang. Based on the results of the study through historical methods with the stages of heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography, it shows the following. Traditional Islamic education still dominated in the early 20th century through pengajian and alim-ulama as teachers. This practice occurred in several places around Singkawang, such as in the large mosque (Jami), surau in Selakau led by H. Muhammad As'ad, Semelagi, and other Malay villages. Driven by the development of Pan-Islamism, the existence of educated natives, and the wild school ordinance, traditional Islamic education was transformed into formal schools. Islamic schools that were once established in Singkawang during this era included the Islamiyah School in the city center, Madrasah in Semelagi Besar, Semelegi Kecil, Sungai Daun, Setapuk Besar, Madrasah Diniyah Setapuk, and Ahhadiyah School Sedau. The curriculum used continued to emphasize Islamic religious studies plus general subjects in the three-year Volkschool and the five-year Standaarschool. The existence of Islamic schools in this city has encouraged the birth of the national movement with the establishment of various national movement organizations.

**Keywords:** Islamic School, Singkawang, Surau, Alim-ulama, Curriculum

*Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mendeskripsikan perkembangan sekolah Islam di Singkawang pada era kolonialisme Hindia-Belanda (1901-1942). Era ini ditandai dengan terjadinya transformasi pendidikan Islam dari corak tradisional ke formal, yang didorong perlunya pengintegrasian pelajaran umum. Hal ini menjadi menarik bahwa sekolah Islam mampu eksis di tengah pesatnya sekolah Misi Katolik dan dominasi masyarakat Tionghoa di Singkawang. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian melalui metode sejarah dengan tahapan heuristik, verifikasi, interpretasi, dan historiografi, menunjukkan hal berikut. Pendidikan Islam tradisional masih mendominasi pada awal abad ke-20 lewat pengajian dan alim-ulama sebagai pengajarnya. Praktik ini terjadi di beberapa tempat sekitar Singkawang, seperti di masjid besar (jami'), surau di Selakau pimpinan H. Muhammad As'ad, Semelagi, dan kampung-kampung Melayu lainnya. Didorong berkembangnya paham Pan Islamisme, keberadaan bumiputera terpelajar, dan ordonansi sekolah liar, pendidikan Islam bercorak tradisional itu bertransformasi menjadi sekolah formal. Sekolah Islam yang pernah berdiri di Singkawang di era ini antara lain Islamiyah School di pusat kota, Madrasah di Semelagi Besar, Semelegi Kecil, Sungai Daun, Setapuk Besar, Madrasah Diniyah Setapuk, dan Ahhadiyah School Sedau. Kurikulum yang digunakan tetap menekankan pelajaran agama Islam ditambah pelajaran umum yang ada di Volkschool tiga tahun dan Standaarschool lima tahun. Keberadaan sekolah Islam di kota ini telah mendorong lahirnya pergerakan kebangsaan dengan berdirinya berbagai organisasi pergerakan nasional.*

**Kata Kunci:** Sekolah Islam, Singkawang, Surau, Alim-ulama, Kurikulum

## INTRODUCTION

The awareness of the importance of education in Indonesia, if traced back, has emerged since the era of the kingdoms. Especially in the era of the dominance of the Islamic Sultanate, with the existence of langgar, padepokan, surau, and so on (Furqan, 2019). The implementation of education in the 16th century AD then experienced a decline due to Western colonialism. In the eyes of the Dutch, for example, colonialism intended to advance the civilization of colored nations (Daliman, 2012). However, in practice, the good intentions of the Dutch were never realized. Then until the end of the 19th century AD, there was no seriousness in opening access to mass education to the people (Frankema, 2013).

The idea of providing access to education to native children only emerged in 1900 through what is called ethical politics, one of the programs being education policy. Even so, education policy is still an exclusive thing. Schooling around the beginning of the 20th century AD which seemed to be developing, was used to further perpetuate colonialism, not directed towards the advancement of the people (Machmudi et al., 2024).

A village school Volkschool for native children was first established in Pontianak in 1892, only after ethical politics began in the early 20th century did it also follow in other cities in the West Kalimantan Residency. Singkawang itself only established a Volkschool after 1908. This was considered too late because the Catholic Mission had built it first in 1906 targeting Chinese children (Ahok et al., 1980).

Native Muslim communities such as the Malays in Singkawang also want access to formal schools for their children. However, they are faced with the dilemma of the lack of government-owned Volkschools. Sending Malay children to Mission schools also seems to be avoided because of differences in principles (Tanasaldy, 2014). Apart from this dilemma, the Malays want schools that also provide Islamic religious lessons.

Concerns about being exposed to Western culture that distances them from their native culture are also another reason for the urgency of establishing Islamic schools (Prabowo & Kumalasari, 2021).

There are several reasons behind the need for Islamic education to be modernized into Islamic schools or madrasahs in the early 20th century. First, the Pan-Islamist movement has awakened the awareness of young people who are on the pilgrimage and studying in the Arabian Peninsula. To later implement Islamic education reform when they return to their homeland, by transforming traditional Islamic education that accommodates general knowledge (Nasrullah et al., 2018). These young people who would later become preachers or ulama also considered that it was time for Islamic education to be managed in a new, more modern form so that its graduates could be recognized as equal to graduates of government schools (Safitri et al., 2020).

Second, the establishment of Islamic Schools was formed as an answer to the lack of schools established by the government. The establishment also seemed to balance the progress of the Mission schools which were growing rapidly and were popular with the Chinese community who dominated Singkawang. Moreover, the number and levels of Mission schools were quite large, from kindergartens to vocational schools, and they were the same in form as government schools (R.K Centraal Missie Bureau voor Onderwijs en Opvoeding, 1937).

Third, there was pressure from the colonial government on Islamic education through several ordinances. For example, the Priesterraden ordinance which regulated the obligation to apply for permission for religious leaders who wanted to provide Islamic teachings (Kumalasari, 2013). The illegal school ordinance in 1932 further tightened private schools, where managers had to obtain a permit to run (Makmur et al., 1993).

This research is something interesting, presenting a new fact that in the colonial era, Islamic schools were able to develop in Singkawang which was known for its dominance of the Chinese community and the center of the Catholic Mission. This will further strengthen the predicate of this city which is famous for its plurality and tolerance. The writing will begin with a description of education in Singkawang in the early 20th century. Continued with the establishment of Islamic schools until the end of the Dutch East Indies colonial period (1942). The curriculum used in Islamic schools is explained in the last section and also discusses the influence of its existence.

The discussion of the history of education in Singkawang was briefly reviewed in the research report of Rustam, Hermansyah, and Erwin (2010), entitled *Sufi Islam in West Kalimantan: Philological Study of the Manuscript of Muhammad As'ad Selakau, Sambas*. The study touched on the practice of traditional Islamic education based on surau around the Sambas Sultanate area in the early 20th century, in this case including in Singkawang. There is also research by Irmayanti (2021) entitled *History of Islamic Education in West Kalimantan*, discussing the transformation of Islamic schools belonging to the Sambas Sultanate. The school, which was later known as Madrasah Al-Sulthaniyah, produced graduates who could become teaching staff as well as agents of Islamic education renewal for the surrounding areas, such as Singkawang.

This study aims to describe the development of Islamic schools in Singkawang during the colonial era, from the early 20th century (1901) to the end of Dutch rule in 1942. In this way, it can be seen how the presence of Islamic schools gave rise to a new educated elite. The existence of Islamic schools also encouraged the emergence of Islamic community solidarity and national awareness in Singkawang so that they could move forward in achieving independence.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher used the historical method to analyze and describe the development of Islamic schools in Singkawang (1901-1942). Determining the topic was carried out as an initial step, followed by the heuristic stages (collecting sources), verification (criticizing sources), interpretation (interpreting sources), and historiography (writing history). Historical sources as construction materials for this study were obtained between April and September 2024. Among the primary sources that were successfully obtained were *Borneo-Barat* Newspaper (1936-1939). These newspapers feature a variety of activities and information about Islamic schools and their respective figures in Singkawang. Secondary sources were also used, such as the results of previous studies in the form of books and journals that discuss the history of education in West Kalimantan.

At the verification stage, to maintain the authenticity of old newspapers from the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia (Perpusnas RI). As for the credibility of the source, it is done by comparing between sources (Kanumuyoso, 2020). The sources that the researcher used to verify credibility include the book *History of Regional Education in West Kalimantan* by Ahok, et al. (1980). This book describes the journey of education in West Kalimantan in general, including the development of education in the colonial era by mentioning schools established in Singkawang.

The next stage is interpretation, which is a study used to be able to imagine the conditions at that time or event that took place which is reconstructed and presented again to today's readers (Miftahuddin, 2020). The last stage is historiography or writing history, where researchers use a social history approach. Social history can reveal past events from various social aspects, such as social class, conflicts of interest, social stratification, social status, and so on (Abbas, 2014). Meanwhile, Kuntowijoyo explains that social facts can be used as study material to explain an event as clearly as possible, even though they are bound by theoretical capital (Kuntowijoyo, 2003). Thus, the study of the history of education is part of the social history approach, because it is closely related to social problems and in that era, education began to be recognized as a community need. This is further supported by the fact that schooling in the 1900-1942 era had given rise to new social elites in the Singkawang community.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Overview of Islamic Education in Singkawang in the Early 20th Century

The development of education in Singkawang in the early 20th century was generally influenced by the ethical-political atmosphere rolled out by the Dutch, namely a mass education program. For this reason, the colonial government presented its first formal school, the *Volkschool* (three-year village school) after 1908 (Ahok et al., 1980). The Catholic Mission was also not left behind, where in 1906 they began to establish elementary schools that were more intended for Chinese children (Yeri OFM. Cap, 2016).

In contrast, in Islamic education circles, which developed in this era, it was still relatively non-formal education based on religious studies in mosques or *surau*. The students, also called *santri*, expected direct knowledge from the *ulama* who were also the imams. There were no levels, class systems, or standard curriculums. Singkawang itself was an area that was formerly part of the Sambas Sultanate so religious scholars were placed to take care of various matters of worship, sharia, and Islamic guidance for the Muslim population. There is a cleric with the rank of *Khatib* and several princes in Singkawang who were placed by the Sambas Sultanate priesthood as religious officials.

Where each village is also equipped with a pious person with the title of Labai (lebai), and mosques also have bilal and modim (Erwin, 2018).

Many of the ulama who provide their teachings through the recitation method in mosques or surau have studied in the Middle East. Rahmatullah (2014), research revealed that there is a network of alim ulama or Tuan Guru alumni from Mecca and Medina who teach at suraus in West Kalimantan. Education in Mecca and Medina is carried out after the Hajj by attending assemblies around the Grand Mosque and the Nabawi Mosque which are supervised by great scholars and leading imams. The Tuan Gurus will stay at least in the two cities to study and deepen their religious knowledge for a minimum of 5 years.

In 1885, a fairly large mosque was built in the center of Singkawang by Bawahasib Marican, an Indian Captain who was also a merchant (Murtadlo, 2013). As is known, the function of mosques in Indonesia is not only as a place of worship and celebrating Islamic holidays, but also as a place for deliberation (meetings), and teaching and learning. Where the curriculum applied is around Islamic religious education (books), and flexible study times before and after congregational prayers (Furqan, 2019). In the Selakau area, which used to be part of Singkawang, there is also a surau as a center for Islamic teaching by teacher H. Muhammad As'ad. He was a student of Sheikh Akhmad Khatib Assambasi during the pilgrimage and studying in Mecca (Mohamed et al., 2018). Therefore, the Islamic teachings given are also based on the *Qadiriyyah wa Naqsbandiyyah tariqat* (Rustam A et al., 2010).

Due to land donations by the Sultan of Sambas, the surau was then enlarged and became a mosque which was inaugurated on December 19, 1923. Unfortunately, H. Muhammad As'ad passed away in 1922. Islamic education activities at that place were finally continued by one of his students and son, H. Zainal (Nawawi, 2018). The existence of surau and religious scholars around the Malay villages is believed to have also helped organize Islamic education in the form of pengajian (Islamic study). This was revealed in Syarif research which stated that there was a religious teacher named Ngah Dolah (1901-1964) who taught Islamic religion in the Semelagi area (Syarif, 2018).

The curriculum for this surau education was relatively simple and did not yet have a standard as it is today. The class system had not been fully implemented, as well as the length of study which was very dependent on the ability of the students to absorb the lessons. The lessons given were generally divided into five large groups, namely: the Qur'an, Worship, Morals, Tauhid, and books (Furqan, 2019). Several methods were used in the learning process, for example, the halaqah method. In this method, a group of students studied under the guidance of a religious teacher who implemented discussions and questions and answers to understand the contents of the material. The sorogan method also seems to be used where students will routinely submit memorization/readings to the teacher (Wibowo, 2023).

Skills education actually also developed in Singkawang but in a traditional form through the observe and imitate method. This can be seen in every ethnic group in Singkawang who carry out a profession from generation to generation. For example, in the Malay (Muslim) people have many professions and work as fishermen with various processed fish that are traded (Suprpta et al., 2019). The skills of fishermen at sea and the skills of fish processing are certainly learned by transferring skills learned from parents to children.

In the future, education based on surau and mosques will transform into formal education in the form of schools or madrasahs. Based on ownership, the types of Islamic



schools that were established in Singkawang in the colonial era, researchers divided into two types. First, schools are managed by a socio-religious organization, and second, Islamic schools are managed privately. However, due to limited resources, the first Islamic school established in Singkawang has not been found.

### **The Establishment of Islamic Schools in Singkawang in the Colonial Era**

The establishment of formal Islamic educational institutions in Singkawang can be called a transformation. Education which was initially traditional and poorly organized, began to change according to the demands of the times that required it to have the characteristics of modern education. Such as being taught by certified teachers, a class system, having a curriculum, evaluation, and proof of student graduation. In short, private schools also began to have systematic and structured lesson plans, adopting similar things in public schools (Makmur et al., 1993).

Schooling that developed in Singkawang after entering the 20th century can be said to be dominated by private schools. The development of schooling in Singkawang is also inseparable from the existence of educated people or educated native elites who then acted as teaching agents (teachers). In West Kalimantan itself in the 1920s there were several educational institutions whose graduates could be employed as teachers. The nearest city Sambas which is also in the same afdeeling as Singkawang, has the Madrasah Al-Sulthaniyah which was established in 1916 under the leadership of Maharaja Imam Basiuni Imran (Safitri et al., 2020). Madrasah Al-Sulthaniyah is equivalent to a 5-year Standaarschool, plus 1 year of in-depth study of Islamic religious material (Irmayanti, 2021).

Later in Singkawang itself, the *Cursus Volksonderwijzers* (CVO) school was also established whose graduates were entitled to teach at Village Schools/*Volkschools* (Paath, 1938c). Especially for Islamic education, the development of Pan-Islamist ideas also influenced the transformation of these surau education models. Where reformist scholars began to emerge who viewed that Islamic education had to adapt to the times, its traditional character could no longer be maintained (Ramadhan et al., 2019).

Islamic schools can also be an alternative for children in Singkawang who want to study Islamic education but still get general lessons. This will not be obtained if they study at government schools (Prabowo & Kumalasari, 2021). The increasing development of schools owned by the Catholic Mission also seems to be a source of inspiration for Islamic religious leaders and Muslim community leaders in Singkawang to catch up.

Another thing that is felt to encourage the emergence of schools in Singkawang is the Priesterraden regulation. This regulation emerged in 1905 which stipulated that people who provide Islamic teachings or studies must obtain permission from the colonial government. This regulation was further strengthened in 1925 when only religious scholars or kiai who received recommendations were allowed to provide Islamic teachings. In 1931 the colonial government even issued the Wilde Scholen Ordonantie (Wild School Ordinance), to close down madrasas and schools that were not licensed or considered dangerous (Kumalasari, 2013).

At least until 1936, there were Islamic schools around Singkawang that were revealed through news in the *Borneo-Barat* newspaper. These Islamic schools include the following. In the downtown area stands the Islamiyah School Singkawang, while in the northern area of the city, there are four schools, namely the Semelagi Besar Islamic Madrasah, the Semelagi Kecil Islamic Madrasah, the Sungai Daun Islamic Madrasah and

the Setapak Besar Madrasah. In the southern area of Singkawang, there is also the Ahhadiyah School in Sedau Village (Badjenet, 1936).

There is also an Islamic school in Singkawang founded by a leading national movement organization. In the book *Sejarah Pendidikan Daerah Kalimantan Barat* (1980), it is stated that Muhammadiyah in West Kalimantan has one *Volkschool* in Singkawang. It is suspected that the school in question is the Madrasah Diniyah in the Setapak area (north of Singkawang) led by Haji Jamil. The length of education is three years. This school was influenced by Muhammadiyah from Haji Jamil who was a preacher from West Sumatra (Hidayat, 2018). It is not known for certain when this madrasah transformed from surau education to formal education (school). However, the source above states that in 1935 this school had existed.

Some Islamic schools or madrasahs in Singkawang are accommodated in the 'Persatuan Pendidikan Islam (PPI)' organization which was founded around June 1938. This indicates that there has been a coordination and cooperation relationship between Islamic schools there. One of the madrasahs that is part of PPI is the Islamiyah School which is located in the center of Singkawang city. The school was said to have a curriculum equivalent to a *Tweede Klasse School* or a five-year *Standaarschool* (Oeloen, 1938). The development of Islamic schools or madrasahs in Singkawang did not immediately mean that traditional Islamic education such as *pengajian* was abandoned. *pengajian* assemblies were maintained as non-formal Islamic education intended for adults. For example, the presence of Muhammadiyah, which at that time was based on *pengajian* activities since 1932, continued to run and grew bigger. This was proven by the success of the Singkawang branch in obtaining official status by the *Hoofdbestuur* Muhammadiyah on November 25, 1939. The same thing happened in Selakau which received official recognition as a branch on June 4, 1940 (Gaffar, 1996).

### **Islamic School Curriculum in Singkawang during the Colonial Era**

The rapid development of formal education in Singkawang during the colonial era as stated above. It can be said to have started from the lack of attention of the Dutch East Indies government to education for non-Europeans. This is in accordance with the pattern of colonial education policy, which in addition to being gradualism, is also felt to have no systematic and measurable educational planning (Syaharuddin & Susanto, 2019).

As stated above, Islamic schools in terms of their operations began to adopt the characteristics of formal schools such as being more organized with a class system and study documents. However, due to the lack of sources, it is not known for certain the curriculum used and the study period at the Islamic schools mentioned above. Tuan H. Ahmad Sood, a person with the position of 'penghulu' who was placed by the Sambas Sultanate in Singkawang, in the *Borneo-Barat* newspaper revealed that Islamic schools in the city had different degrees and subjects (Badjenet, 1936).

From the information above, it seems that the curriculum used in several Islamic schools in Singkawang is similar to Islamic schools in Pontianak in the same era. Previous research conducted by the author revealed the existence of Islamic schools in Pontianak such as Perguruan Alqadriah and Perguruan Saigoniah which only prioritize Islamic religious studies and use Arabic as the language of instruction (Prabowo & Kumalasari, 2021).

Thus, the change from traditional to formal has only touched on the school organization and the classroom system, not yet the curriculum and subjects. However, it is also possible that there are Islamic schools or madrasahs in Singkawang whose level is

indeed equal to government schools, such as the three-year *Volksschool* and the five-year *Standaarschool*. For example, the Madrasah Diniyah in Setapak which was influenced by Muhammadiyah. The madrasah has a three-year study period similar to that of *Volksschool*. The curriculum of the school, which is also called the village school, provides lessons in arithmetic, writing, reading, and drawing. Usually, madrasas in that era also added Arabic language lessons and other lessons related to Islam (Hidayat, 2018).

Meanwhile, the Islamic school with a five-year study period, namely the Islamiyah School, is similar to the *Tweede Klasse School* also known as *Standaarschool*. The curriculum applied by this type of school is an expansion and deepening of the material in *Volksschool*, plus lessons in natural sciences and earth sciences (Nasution, 2001). Of course, Arabic and lessons related to Islam are added as the characteristics of the school. The management of the Islamiyah School also seemed to want to improve teaching by trying to recruit teaching staff who were graduates of the Muhammadiyah *Kweekschool* (Oeloen, 1938).

The existence of this Islamic school, which was equal to a government school, opened up opportunities for young people in Singkawang to pursue higher education. *Volksschool* graduates could continue to *Vervolgschool* (a two-year extension school) to be equivalent to graduates of a five-year elementary school. They could also continue to several vocational schools around Singkawang such as *Ambachtschool* (a carpentry school) and *Cultuurschool* (an agricultural school) which were run by the Catholic Mission (Ahok et al., 1980).

Graduates of the Islamiyah School, which is equivalent to *Standaarschool*, can continue to the CVO school for two years to be able to teach at *Volksschool*. They can also go to *Normalschool* (four years) to become teachers at *Vervolgschool* and *Standaarschool* (Buchori, 2009). Trade schools (*Kleinhandelschool*) can also be an option for those who want to study economics (Paath, 1938d).

The development of formal education brought several advances in the social order. Graduates have broad opportunities to develop themselves or be absorbed in more decent jobs so that they become a new elite in society. Education has also encouraged national awareness and a sense of unity among all young men and women in Singkawang, starting in the 1930s, various movement organizations and social organizations emerged in this city. In 1922, Gusti Sulung Lelanang (GSL), who was a leftist activist and teacher in Singkawang, revived the Syarikat Islam Merah (SI) which had a progressive bent in that city (Suwignjo & Mansur, 1972).

Other movement organizations in this city besides Muhammadiyah, there is also the Singkawang branch of the Partai Indonesia Raya (Parindra) which was founded and received official status on December 1, 1938 (Paath, 1938e), followed by the formation of its youth organization wing, namely Surya Wirawan. In March 1938, Muslim youths in Singkawang also founded the Jong Islamietische Padvindere Organisatie (JIPO) scouting organization (Paath, 1938a). Not to be left behind, women founded the Persatuan Kaum Ibu Singkawang (PERKIS) in June 1939 (Paath, 1939).

The existence of Islamic schools in Singkawang also inspired other areas in one afdeeling. For example, in Bengkayang which wanted to establish an Islamic school in June 1938. This plan received support from community leaders there. The Bengkayang village head himself was among those who supported the establishment of this school and stated his willingness to become one of its teachers (Paath, 1938b).



## CONCLUSION

The implementation of Islamic education in Singkawang in the early 20th century AD was still dominated by traditional patterns through religious studies in prayer houses and mosques. Islamic scholars played an important role in the process of teaching Islam in Singkawang because, in addition to being religious affairs employees, they were also teachers. There is a large mosque in the center of Singkawang which was established in 1885 and also functions as a place to study Islam. Similarly, in Selakau there is a prayer house managed by H. Muhammad As'ad and in 1923 it became a mosque under the leadership of H. Zainal. Other prayer houses around the Malay villages in Singkawang are believed to also provide Islamic education with a curriculum that focuses on the lessons of the Qur'an, Worship, Morals, Tawhid, and books.

This traditional Islamic education was then transformed into a modern formal school. The existence of educated native elites acted as teaching agents (teachers) and was also influenced by Pan-Islamist ideas about the renewal of Islamic education. The emergence of the Priesterraden rules and the organization of illegal schools also accelerated the transformation from traditional Islamic education to Islamic schools that accommodated general subjects. Islamic schools that were once established in Singkawang during this era included Islamic Schools and Madrasahs in Semelagi Besar, Semelegi Kecil, Sungai Daun, Setapuk Besar, Ahhadiyah Sedau School, and Madrasah Diniyah in Setapuk (owned by Muhammadiyah).

The curriculum imposed in the above schools generally adopted the lessons taught in Volkschool and Standaarschool schools plus Islamic religious lessons. The existence of Islamic schools was able to improve the status of young people in Singkawang to get more decent and formal jobs, and to be able to continue to a higher level. Including encouraging national awareness with the emergence of several national movement organizations in Singkawang such as Muhammadiyah and Parindra, and inspiring other areas such as Bengkayang which planned to build Islamic schools.

There are still opportunities to deepen the topic of Islamic education in Singkawang, for example, after the era of Indonesian independence. To find out the dynamics of changes in Islamic schools that existed in the colonial era, historical research supported by more complete and comprehensive data can be used. That way, a series of studies on Islamic education in Singkawang can show that Islamic schools also developed in the city known for being multicultural.

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