

INTERNATIONALIZING ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA: A LESSON LEARNED FROM AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality and global recognition of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. This study investigates how these institutions implement internationalization by drawing insights from the experience of Monash University in Australia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The findings indicate that while Islamic higher education institutions have implemented key aspects of internationalization, there is still room for improvement. Institutions must continuously enhance educational quality while maintaining their unique identity to attract international students. Greater autonomy in financial and administrative management is necessary to align Islamic universities with other leading public institutions. Policy support from the government is essential in ensuring institutional autonomy and protecting human resource rights without excessive intervention. Seeking international accreditation through relevant accrediting bodies is also critical in strengthening global competitiveness. These findings highlight the need for strategic efforts by university leaders, government, and stakeholders to advance the internationalization agenda in Islamic higher education. Strengthening institutional autonomy, improving quality standards, and achieving international accreditation will contribute to greater global engagement and recognition of Islamic universities in Indonesia.

Keywords: Accreditation, Global Competitiveness, Internationalization, Institutional Autonomy, Islamic Higher Education

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, like many other countries, faces increasing pressure to internationalize its higher education institutions. This demand comes not only from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology but also from the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023). However, Islamic universities in Indonesia have not yet fully achieved successful internationalization. Accreditation, a key component of internationalization (Romanowski, 2022; Abasi et al., 2022), has not been prioritized, with only Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga holding internationally accredited study programs (Sibawaihi et al., 2024). Other institutions remain in the preparation or learning stages. This lack of international accreditation poses a significant challenge, as aligning with international standards is crucial for global recognition (Levin, 2001). Additionally, limited support for lecturer mobility restricts participation in global academic activities (Fielden, 2008), further hindering internationalization efforts.

To explore these challenges, this study examines how internationalization is implemented in Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions, drawing insights from Monash University in Australia. Two institutions, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah and UIN Sunan Kalijaga, were selected based on their explicit commitment to internationalization in their vision and mission statements. Both institutions have increasingly prioritized internationalization

following their transformation into universities (Fuadi, 2015; Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023). Monash University was chosen as a comparison due to its pioneering role in establishing international branch campuses, including one in Indonesia, making it a relevant model for understanding internationalization in higher education (Levin, 2001; Monash University, 2024a).

Previous studies have explored various aspects of internationalization in higher education. Scholars generally view internationalization as a response to globalization in higher education (Levin, 2001; Mok, 2018; Smith & Samuell, 2024). It has been widely discussed in institutional policies and academic discourse (Jones et al., 2021; Chen & Liang, 2024; Amaro et al., 2024). Comparative studies have examined the internationalization policies and implementation strategies in different countries (Gonfa et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024), highlighting the variations in approaches and outcomes.

In Indonesia, studies on higher education internationalization have been conducted in both general and regional contexts. Scholars such as Tian (2022), Ikhlas (2023), and Simbolon (2023) have analyzed internationalization efforts in Indonesian higher education, while Tran, Zou, and Ota (2023) examined regional trends in Southeast and East Asia. Additionally, Williams et al. (2021) investigated internationalization within the Asia-Pacific region. Specific studies on the internationalization of Islamic higher education institutions have been conducted by Assegaf et al. (2022), Sibawaihi and Fernandes (2023), and Junusi et al. (2024). However, research directly linking the internationalization of Indonesian Islamic higher education with Australian institutions remains scarce. This study addresses this gap by examining the internationalization strategies of Islamic universities in Indonesia in comparison with Monash University's approach, offering new insights into improving global engagement and institutional development.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, which focuses on understanding meanings, concepts, and characteristics (Berg & Lune, 2012). A case study approach was applied to conduct an in-depth analysis of internationalization in the selected universities. Case studies provide comprehensive insights into complex issues by allowing researchers to examine multiple perspectives (Hoepfl, 1997; Priya, 2021). Specifically, this study adopts a historical organizational case study, utilizing direct data collection (McMillan, 2008). Through this approach, the internationalization of the two Islamic universities is regarded as a historical process within educational institutions, enabling a deeper understanding of their development over time.

Data collection was carried out through interviews and document analysis. Interviews were chosen as they allow for a more detailed exploration of participants' ideas, perspectives, and beliefs, making them a suitable method for qualitative case studies (Bennett et al., 2008; Gray, 2009). Participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling, focusing on individuals directly involved in leading both universities. To ensure ethical considerations, participant identities were anonymized. Document analysis, defined as "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents" (Bowen, 2009), was conducted by examining journal articles, government regulations, books, online sources, official reports, and unpublished materials. Data analysis involved descriptive and critical analysis. Descriptive analysis provided detailed information about the implementation of internationalization, while critical analysis assessed the intellectual and strategic aspects of internationalization efforts (Brown, 1993; Jamil et al., 2024), enabling a deeper evaluation of policies and practices in the selected universities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Internationalization of Higher Education

Based on the observation, the study found that the internationalization of higher education in the selected Islamic universities was implemented through various strategies aligned with global trends. The universities demonstrated efforts to integrate international elements into their academic frameworks, including international student recruitment, faculty participation in global academic activities, and the pursuit of international accreditation. Additionally, institutional policies reflected commitments to global engagement by fostering international research collaborations and partnerships with foreign universities. However, while these universities have initiated internationalization efforts, their level of implementation remains inconsistent, with significant challenges in achieving full accreditation and supporting faculty mobility.

Furthermore, the study observed that internationalization efforts primarily focused on curriculum-related initiatives and cross-border academic interactions. The presence of international students and faculty, along with the facilitation of research collaborations, indicated steps toward global engagement. Nevertheless, the extent to which these institutions have successfully extended their campuses beyond national borders remains limited. Although some partnerships with international institutions have been established, they have not fully translated into substantial academic or infrastructural expansion abroad. These findings suggest that while internationalization is a recognized goal, the implementation requires further development to align with established global standards.

The findings align with Levin's (2001) concept of internationalization as a globalization behavior, wherein universities respond to global pressures by extending their academic reach. Internationalization involves integrating global elements into the curriculum and expanding institutional influence beyond national boundaries. The study's results reflect this process, as the universities attempted to globalize their curriculum through student recruitment and faculty mobility while forming international collaborations (Levin, 2001; Clarke & Kirby, 2022; Ndaipa et al., 2023). However, as Resnik (2008) and Rudolph (2005) argue, successful internationalization requires deeper engagement with global academic culture and labor market demands, which remain areas for improvement.

Fielden's (2008) framework of internationalization emphasizes faculty and student mobility, human resource alliances, and partnerships with external institutions. While the universities studied engaged in mobility programs and formed collaborations, they faced difficulties in securing financial and structural support for these initiatives. Teichler (2004) further underscores the importance of partnerships in strengthening institutional reputation and advancing knowledge. The study's findings indicate that while some partnerships exist, their impact remains limited. Additionally, Levin's (2001) emphasis on cultural exchange and curriculum delivery abroad suggests that internationalization should also involve absorbing diverse cultural perspectives, an aspect that requires more attention in the universities examined. By integrating these perspectives, the study highlights both the progress and the gaps in internationalization efforts within Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

Implementation of Internationalization in the Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia

UIN Syarif Hidayatullah has initiated the process of becoming a *Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Badan Hukum (PTN-BH)*/ Public University as a Legal Entity (Participant 4, personal communication, January 23, 2023), whereas UIN Sunan Kalijaga is still in the preparation phase (Participant 2, personal communication, December 12, 2022). To attract international students, both universities offer scholarships, but the number of applicants remains below the target (Participant 1, personal communication, November 30, 2022). Faculty members are provided

with financial incentives for publishing research in internationally indexed journals such as Scopus and Web of Science (Participant 2, personal communication, December 12, 2022; Participants 4 & 5, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

Other efforts include sending faculty abroad for further studies (Participant 1, personal communication, November 30, 2022), inviting foreign lecturers (Participant 1, personal communication, November 30, 2022), and pursuing international accreditation for academic programs. UIN Sunan Kalijaga has accredited 18 study programs through the Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), while UIN Syarif Hidayatullah is still preparing for the process (Participant 3, personal communication, January 13, 2023). Both universities have also established collaborative agreements with foreign institutions at various levels (Participant 1, personal communication, November 30, 2022; Participant 2, personal communication, December 12, 2022; Participant 3, personal communication, January 13, 2023; Participant 4, personal communication, January 23, 2023; Participant 5, personal communication, January 23, 2023).

The findings support Levin's (2001) conceptualization of internationalization as a response to globalization, where universities adapt to global trends by integrating international elements into their academic and institutional frameworks. The strategies employed by UIN Syarif Hidayatullah and UIN Sunan Kalijaga—such as international student recruitment, academic mobility, and research publication incentives—align with the broader movement of higher education institutions striving for global engagement (Levin, 2001; Clarke & Kirby, 2022; Ndaipa et al., 2023). However, as Resnik (2008) and Rudolph (2005) noted, effective internationalization requires more than institutional commitment; it demands robust structural and financial support, which remains a challenge for these universities due to their BLU status.

Fielden's (2008) framework highlights three essential components of internationalization: faculty and student mobility, human resource alliances, and institutional partnerships. While both universities have demonstrated efforts in these areas, financial constraints significantly limit their ability to support faculty participation in global academic activities. Unlike *PTN-BH* institutions, which receive greater financial autonomy, the two Islamic universities rely on limited government funding, making it difficult to compete with more established international universities. The disparity in financial resources is particularly evident in lecturer mobility programs, where faculty members at *PTN-BH* receive institutional funding for international conferences, while those at UIN often face financial barriers (Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023).

Furthermore, Teichler's (2004) emphasis on the role of international partnerships in enhancing institutional reputation and expanding research aligns with the study's findings. Although both universities have made efforts to establish collaborations with foreign institutions, these partnerships have yet to fully translate into significant academic or infrastructural expansions abroad. Levin's (2001) broader definition of internationalization, which includes cultural assimilation and curriculum expansion beyond national borders, suggests that for internationalization to be truly effective, institutions must actively incorporate international cultural perspectives. While the two universities have made progress in this regard, further efforts are needed to strengthen faculty exchanges, increase foreign lecturer engagement, and establish a more comprehensive framework for cross-border education.

Lessons from Australia for Advancing the Internationalization of Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia

At Monash University, the quality of education is a primary focus of the institution's leadership. University leaders believe that maintaining high educational standards is essential for attracting international students and ensuring the institution's reputation (Participant 9, personal

communication, March 3, 2023; Participant 10, personal communication, March 15, 2023). The emphasis on quality is reflected in the university's programs, where academic excellence serves as the foundation for all strategic decisions. As a result, Monash University has become the second-largest university in Australia in terms of international students. The university's commitment to maintaining a high standard of education is further demonstrated by its achievements in global rankings, with its pharmacy/pharmacology program ranking second worldwide and its education program ranking eighth. Additionally, Monash University ensures that each study program has distinctive academic characteristics that set it apart from similar programs at other universities, making it a leader in various fields (Participant 9, personal communication, March 3, 2023).

The experience of Monash University highlights the importance of quality education in attracting international students, a crucial aspect that Islamic universities in Indonesia, such as UIN Syarif Hidayatullah and UIN Sunan Kalijaga, must consider. These universities face challenges in international student recruitment, which could be attributed to the perceived quality of education offered. Stakeholders, including university leaders, must focus on improving educational standards as a key strategy for increasing internationalization. Enhancing quality requires a strong accreditation system, both nationally and internationally, to ensure that programs meet global benchmarks. Furthermore, Islamic universities must strengthen their academic identity by integrating Islamic studies with general disciplines to create a well-rounded and competitive curriculum (Participant 9, personal communication, March 3, 2023; Participant 10, personal communication, March 15, 2023).

In addition to improving overall education quality, Islamic universities should emphasize the uniqueness of their academic programs to establish themselves as global leaders in specific fields. Each study program should develop specialized strengths that differentiate it from similar programs at other institutions. For instance, the Pendidikan Agama Islam (Islamic Religious Education) program could be designed to integrate Islamic teachings with contemporary disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, fostering an interdisciplinary approach to religious education (Ma'rifah & Sibawaihi, 2023). By highlighting distinctive academic characteristics and ensuring high educational quality, Islamic universities in Indonesia can enhance their appeal to international students and contribute to the global academic community.

Monash University, as an Australian public university, has demonstrated significant autonomy in managing its educational direction, including its internationalization initiatives. This autonomy is evident in its ability to establish overseas branches and engage in extensive collaborations with institutions worldwide (Participant 7, personal communication, March 2, 2023). Notably, Monash University made history as the first foreign university to establish a branch in Indonesia. This achievement reflects not only the institution's autonomy but also the bold leadership that enables such expansion. The success of Monash in developing international branches is attributed to two key factors: the measurable courage and high self-confidence of its leaders (Participant 9, personal communication, March 3, 2023). Leadership plays a critical role in steering universities toward internationalization, as evidenced in studies emphasizing the impact of visionary leadership on institutional progress (Brooks & Normore, 2010). Similarly, the leaders of Indonesia's state Islamic universities must take an active role in guiding their institutions toward greater autonomy, as institutional independence has been identified as a key factor in successful internationalization efforts (Le, 2022).

In Indonesia, the highest level of institutional autonomy is granted through the Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Badan Hukum (PTN-BH) status (Sibawaihi et al., 2024). Several universities under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology have already attained *PTN-BH* status, allowing them to manage their own policies, finances, and academic

programs. However, under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, no state Islamic university has yet achieved this status, except for the Universitas Islam Internasional Indonesia (UIII), which was designed from its inception as an international Islamic university. Attaining *PTN-BH* status would provide state Islamic universities with greater flexibility to establish new study programs, independently manage financial resources, and secure endowment funds (Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023). This autonomy is also a critical step toward enabling these institutions to establish international branches, similar to Monash University's expansion strategy. If Indonesian Islamic universities aspire to strengthen their global presence, university leaders must consider the strategic importance of achieving *PTN-BH* status.

To attain this highest level of autonomy, leaders of state Islamic universities must actively work toward meeting the government's requirements for *PTN-BH* status. UIN Syarif Hidayatullah has taken proactive steps in this regard by formally proposing its transition to *PTN-BH* (Participant 4, personal communication, January 23, 2023). The path to achieving this status requires significant institutional improvements, including enhancing human resource quality, strengthening national and international accreditation standards, improving public service quality, and expanding collaborations at both national and global levels. Without these essential improvements, the goal of institutional autonomy and internationalization will remain out of reach. Leaders of state Islamic universities must, therefore, commit to comprehensive reforms that will enable their institutions to gain autonomy, thereby fostering greater opportunities for global engagement and expansion.

Monash University's autonomy is primarily determined by government regulations and funding, as it is recognized as one of the top universities in Australia. This indicates that the autonomy of higher education institutions is inherently linked to the legal framework established by the government (Participant 9, personal communication, March 3, 2023; Participant 10, personal communication, March 15, 2023). In the case of state Islamic universities in Indonesia, greater institutional autonomy should be supported by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, ensuring that universities can achieve the highest level of independence without unnecessary bureaucratic constraints. Any additional conditions or agreements imposed by ministries that contradict existing laws should be reconsidered. One key area where the government can demonstrate support is in facilitating the acceleration of lecturers to professorship status, which is often a prerequisite for universities seeking *PTN-BH* status. However, becoming a professor should not be seen as a mere requirement but rather as a process that enables lecturers to contribute significantly to scientific knowledge through publications and research (Participant 8, personal communication, March 2, 2023). To further encourage research productivity, regulations should be implemented that bind professors to their academic responsibilities, ensuring that they continuously contribute internationally recognized scholarly work.

Autonomy should be granted as broadly as possible in accordance with existing regulations without direct government intervention in university affairs. Policies applied to higher education institutions under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology should also be consistently applied to those under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. It is crucial to avoid administrative practices that could undermine the legitimacy of established regulations across different ministries. The government must ensure that policies are implemented with fairness and objectivity, eliminating any form of politicization that could prioritize certain groups over others (Participant 8, personal communication, March 2, 2023). Political interference in educational affairs has historically hindered efforts to improve and reform higher education (Trinidad, 2024). Therefore, maintaining transparency and adherence to regulations is essential in fostering a more autonomous and competitive academic environment (Maringe, 2008).

Efforts to accelerate the transition of state Islamic universities to *PTN-BH* status should also focus on enhancing human resource quality through increased funding and research opportunities. The government can play a crucial role by providing adequate financial support for lecturers to engage in international research collaborations. Research, as one of the three core responsibilities of lecturers under the *Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi* framework, holds strategic importance in strengthening both faculty expertise and university accreditation. At Monash University, lecturers with a decade of experience are entitled to conduct university-funded international research (Participant 8, personal communication, March 2, 2023). This policy serves as a valuable reference for state Islamic universities, emphasizing the need for institutional support to enhance research capabilities and global academic competitiveness (Maringe & Gibbs, 2009).

The findings indicate that achieving institutional autonomy, particularly *PTN-BH* status for state Islamic universities requires comprehensive government support and a clear regulatory framework. Lessons from Monash University highlight the importance of ensuring that autonomy is rooted in legal provisions and reinforced by adequate funding mechanisms. Government policies should prioritize fairness and objectivity, avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic constraints and political interference that may hinder academic progress. Additionally, strengthening human resources through international research opportunities and faculty development programs is crucial for improving university accreditation and global competitiveness (Oralkan, 2023). By addressing these structural and policy-related challenges, state Islamic universities in Indonesia can move toward greater autonomy and international recognition.

Monash University places significant emphasis on accreditation as a key factor in enhancing its reputation and attracting international collaboration (Participant 6, personal communication, February 27, 2023). Accreditation serves as a crucial benchmark that not only strengthens institutional credibility but also increases its appeal to international students. In selecting an international accreditation body, Monash University leaders consider both the university's strategic interests and the future prospects of its graduates (Participant 6, personal communication, February 27, 2023). For example, Monash Business School has earned accreditation from three prestigious global bodies: the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the EQUIS Accreditation System, and the Association of MBAs (AMBA) Accredited Program. These accreditations enhance the employability of graduates, enabling them to secure positions in leading institutions and companies worldwide, including in the United States (Participant 6, personal communication, February 27, 2023).

Drawing from Monash University's approach, higher education institutions in Indonesia, particularly UIN Sunan Kalijaga and UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, must strategically select credible international accreditation agencies relevant to their study programs. UIN Sunan Kalijaga has made notable progress by accrediting 18 study programs, while UIN Syarif Hidayatullah is currently in the preparation phase for international accreditation (Participant 4, personal communication, January 23, 2023). There are two key takeaways from this process. First, institutions should carefully choose accreditation agencies based on their relevance to specific disciplines rather than relying on a single accreditation body like FIBAA for all study programs. Different accreditation agencies have varying scopes and criteria, which influence the quality and recognition of the accreditation (Participant 6, personal communication, February 27, 2023). Second, study programs may seek accreditation from multiple bodies, as seen in Monash Business School's case, where each accreditation agency provides unique value and benefits (Participant 6, personal communication, February 27, 2023). The government should facilitate this process by offering financial support for accreditation and other quality

improvement initiatives, as securing both national and international accreditation can be financially challenging for universities.

The findings highlight that institutional autonomy is crucial for the internationalization of higher education, as seen in Monash University's ability to expand globally and establish international collaborations (Mashur et al., (2023). In contrast, state Islamic universities in Indonesia remain under government jurisdiction, limiting their capacity to achieve similar progress. Granting *PTN-BH* status could provide these institutions with greater flexibility in managing study programs, finances, and academic mobility, yet policy differences between ministries continue to pose challenges (Thi Thu Le et al., 2024). Additionally, accreditation plays a strategic role in enhancing global competitiveness. Monash University's use of multiple international accreditation bodies ensures its graduates receive globally recognized qualifications, while Islamic universities in Indonesia are still progressing in this area. To strengthen their international standing, these institutions should select accreditation agencies relevant to their academic disciplines and receive adequate government support, as the costs of international accreditation often hinder their global recognition.

The internationalization initiatives of UIN Sunan Kalijaga and UIN Syarif Hidayatullah have addressed key elements of higher education globalization, including international publications, engagement with international students and lecturers, and efforts toward international accreditation—despite being constrained by limited funding (Garira, 2024). Drawing from Monash University's experience, both universities must focus on improving educational quality and highlighting their institutional uniqueness to attract global interest (Irawan et al., 2022). Attaining *PTN-BH* status is essential to overcoming financial challenges, especially in supporting academic mobility, and requires strong government backing through equitable policies and sufficient funding (Wardi et al., 2025). Strategic, discipline-specific international accreditation—potentially through multiple agencies—should also be prioritized to enhance global competitiveness. While opening overseas branches may be ambitious, the immediate focus should be reinforcing academic excellence, building faculty capacity, particularly lecturers (A. Samad et al., 2023), securing strong national accreditation, and upgrading educational infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that while UIN Sunan Kalijaga and UIN Syarif Hidayatullah have made significant strides in implementing internationalization, they continue to face structural, financial, and policy-related challenges. Lessons drawn from Monash University highlight that achieving international standards requires more than institutional will—it demands strong leadership, a firm commitment to quality, increased autonomy, and supportive government policies. Strategic efforts such as securing international accreditation, promoting faculty and student mobility, and aligning national policies are essential to enhancing the global competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. Moving forward, coordinated collaboration between university leaders and policymakers is crucial to ensuring these institutions can contribute meaningfully to global academic discourse. For future research, it is recommended to explore the perspectives of students, alumni, and international partners to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact and outcomes of internationalization efforts. Comparative studies involving other Islamic universities in different countries could also provide broader insights into best practices and models that are effective in diverse contexts.

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