

Globalizing Higher Education: Strategic Approaches to Enhancing Quality in Universities for International Recognition

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Abstract:

As universities strive for global recognition, integrating internationalization and digitalization into their educational systems has become crucial. This study aims to analyze the strategies employed by the State Islamic University's Postgraduate Program to enhance educational quality and achieve international recognition. The research approach is a case study with a qualitative design involving in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. Data analysis is done through condensation, reduction, and visualization of data, as well as verification to ensure the validity of the findings. The study results indicate that the Postgraduate Program implements a strategy of curriculum internationalization, international cooperation, and the application of digital technology to improve the quality of education. These efforts include developing a curriculum by international standards, cooperating with foreign universities, and integrating technologies such as E-learning and AI for more interactive learning. Despite the challenges of adapting technology, continuous training is a solution to improving digital skills. The implications of this study indicate that implementing internationalization and digitalization policies can increase the competitiveness of higher education.

Keywords: *International Recognition, International Cooperation, Digitalization*

Abstrak:

Seiring dengan upaya universitas untuk mendapatkan pengakuan global, integrasi internasionalisasi dan digitalisasi ke dalam sistem pendidikan menjadi sangat penting. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi yang diterapkan oleh Program Pascasarjana Universitas Islam Negeri untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan dan mendapatkan pengakuan internasional. Pendekatan penelitian adalah studi kasus dengan desain kualitatif yang melibatkan wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui kondensasi, reduksi, dan visualisasi data, serta verifikasi untuk memastikan keabsahan temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Program Pascasarjana menerapkan strategi internasionalisasi kurikulum, kerja sama internasional, dan penerapan teknologi digital untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan. Upaya tersebut meliputi pengembangan kurikulum sesuai standar internasional, kerja sama dengan universitas asing, dan integrasi teknologi seperti E-learning dan AI untuk pembelajaran yang lebih interaktif. Meskipun menghadapi tantangan dalam mengadaptasi teknologi, pelatihan berkelanjutan merupakan solusi untuk meningkatkan keterampilan digital. Implikasi dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan kebijakan internasionalisasi dan digitalisasi dapat meningkatkan daya saing pendidikan tinggi.

Kata Kunci: *Pengakuan Internasional, Kerjasama Internasional, Digitalisasi*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays an important role in a country's social and economic development, especially in forming quality human resources (Kooli & Abadli, 2022; Ngoc & Tien, 2023). In the era of globalization, higher education quality is one indicator of a country's progress. Improving the quality of higher education impacts the quality of graduates and affects the competitiveness of universities at the global level, thus attracting international students and strengthening the university's reputation (Fernandes & Singh, 2022; Usman et al., 2022). The academic and broader communities want to understand how higher education strategies can adapt to global needs. Universities worldwide are now competing to improve their quality to compete in the international arena (Al-Mamary & Alshallaqi, 2022; Ngoc et al., 2023). One way to achieve this is to develop and implement strategies to enhance education quality, especially in postgraduate programs.

The problem faced by many universities, including this university, is how to improve the quality of their education to be recognized internationally. This is related to academic standards and includes policies, resource management, and international partnerships that can strengthen the university's position on the global education map. Universities with Islamic-based educational characteristics are sometimes considered more focused on locality and less integrated into the global network of higher education (Ashida, 2022; Fathana et al., 2024). Some of the main problems that need to be resolved include a curriculum that has not been fully standardized internationally, limited research quality, and limitations in building cooperation with foreign universities.

UIN KHAS Jember, has made various efforts to improve the quality of education, international recognition is still a significant challenge. Many universities in Indonesia, especially outside Java, face problems in building an international image and increasing their competitiveness. However, in recent years, this university has begun to develop cooperation with several foreign universities, modernize the curriculum, and strengthen the quality of research. Phenomenon shows a gap between the potential of universities and the challenges of globalization that must be addressed immediately.

Some studies focus on implementing international standards in higher education curricula, while others emphasize the importance of international collaboration and strengthening university reputation through global accreditation (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024; Hoai et al., 2023). Shayery et al. (2022) show that universities that successfully improve their quality to gain international recognition tend to have a clear vision of internationalization and significant investment in research facilities. However, many of these studies are still limited to large universities with greater resources, while little attention is paid to smaller universities or those based on religious education.

Marginson (2022) emphasizes that the quality of global higher education is not only about following international standards but also about the ability of

universities to maintain their local identity and values. The challenges of universities focus on how context-appropriate internationalization strategies can be developed by leveraging the universities' internal strengths, such as Islamic-based curricula and strong academic communities (Rana et al., 2022). A weakness of previous research is the lack of studies examining Islamic universities in Indonesia in the context of internationalization. Therefore, this study fills this gap by focusing on strategies that can be implemented at this university.

This study brings novelty in examining internationalization strategies in Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Although many studies discuss the internationalization of higher education, few specifically examine how religious-based universities can adapt internationalization policies without losing their identity. This study is critical to complete because it will provide practical recommendations for Islamic universities in Indonesia in formulating effective internationalization strategies.

This study aims to answer the following: What strategies are implemented by the Postgraduate Program of UIN KHAS Jember to improve the quality of education to gain international recognition? Although this campus has shown progress in several aspects of internationalization, several areas still need to be improved, especially in terms of strengthening international networks and improving research facilities. This study provides an original contribution to developing a more effective internationalization strategy, which similar universities in Indonesia can adopt.

This research is important because globalization affects every aspect of higher education, and only universities that can adapt to these changes can survive in the international arena. With the increasing competition between universities worldwide, international recognition has become the main goal for higher education institutions, especially postgraduate programs. UIN KHAS Jember, despite having great potential as an Islamic-based university, faces challenges in integrating local characteristics with global demands.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case study research design to explore more deeply the strategic approach to improving the quality of higher education at the Postgraduate Program of the Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq State Islamic University. The case study approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomena occurring at the university and the factors influencing international recognition in higher education (Dehalwar & Sharma, 2024). The selection of this location is based on the university's strategic role in developing higher education in the East Java region and its commitment to improving academic quality to achieve international standards. This university's uniqueness and challenges are the main reasons for choosing it as a research object.

The data collection techniques used are in-depth interviews with various related parties (Bazen et al., 2021), such as faculty leaders, lecturers, and postgraduate students, and participatory observation on campus. Documentation related to policies and reports on the quality of education at the university will also be collected to provide a more complete picture of the international recognition efforts that have been made.

Data analysis was carried out through data condensation, reduction, visualization, and verification to ensure the validity of the findings (Dzogovic & Bajrami, 2023). The first step is data condensation, filtering, and selecting relevant information from interviews and documents. Furthermore, data reduction is carried out by grouping information based on the emerging themes; then, data display is carried out to facilitate visualization of the findings. Finally, data verification is carried out to ensure the consistency and accuracy of the information obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Postgraduate Policy and Vision in Improving Quality

The Postgraduate Program of Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq State Islamic University of Jember has a clear vision to become a center for research-based Islamic education that excels at the national and international levels. This vision is reflected in the policies and strategies implemented by the Postgraduate Program, with the primary goal of improving the quality of education in order to compete on the global stage. Several central policies are implemented to achieve this vision, including improving academic quality, internationalizing the curriculum, and expanding cooperation with universities abroad.

The Postgraduate Director emphasized that one of the central policies to achieve this vision is improving academic quality, which includes strengthening research and curriculum development based on global challenges. This policy aims to ensure that the curriculum taught is relevant to the development of science and the demands of the international academic world. The vision and mission document also emphasizes developing research-based science with a global orientation.

The Postgraduate Program has made efforts to direct its curriculum to be more adaptive to the development of science and international academic demands. One real indicator of this effort is adopting a digital-based learning system that facilitates material delivery more effectively and efficiently. In addition, the Postgraduate also applies an international collaborative approach to the learning process.

Cooperation with foreign universities is not only limited to academic exchanges but also includes joint research programs and capacity building for lecturers and students. This strategy aims to expand academic networks with foreign institutions and ensure that the curriculum taught is by international standards. Using digital technology in learning is a strategic step that can increase accessibility and effectiveness in delivering materials. This technology integration allows students to access learning materials flexibly, supporting the Postgraduate program's goal of preparing graduates to compete in the global market.

International cooperation and the use of digital technology also have a positive impact on curriculum development. By following technological developments and international education trends, the Postgraduate Program can provide more relevant and quality education, supporting international recognition. This policy and vision in improving the quality of education on a

global scale involve various strategic steps, such as strengthening research, internationalizing the curriculum, and utilizing digital technology and international collaboration. These steps demonstrate the Postgraduate program's commitment to becoming a center of superior and competitive education at the international level by providing relevant and high-quality education.

Internationalization of Curriculum and Academic Programs

The Postgraduate Program of the Kiai Haji Achmad Siddiq State Islamic University of Jember continues to strive to develop a curriculum that meets international standards. Benchmarking aims to compare best practices applied globally so that the prepared curriculum can meet broader academic needs. Thus, the Postgraduate curriculum is expected to accommodate the development of science and global demands in higher education. The Deputy Director of Postgraduate emphasized that they continue to benchmark with foreign universities and invite visiting professors from abroad to provide global insights and perspectives in learning. He said, "We continue to benchmark with universities abroad, invite visiting professors from abroad, and implement an internationally recognized credit system" (P2). This shows that the Postgraduate Program is very serious about implementing a curriculum that aligns with global academic practices.

One of the heads of study programs added that several courses have been revised to align with global demands as a concrete step in meeting international standards. "We have revised several courses to be more in line with global standards, as well as opening international classes with English and Arabic as the medium of instruction" (P5). The revision of these courses includes updating the materials and teaching methods that emphasize the international perspective more. In addition, opening international classes aims to prepare students to face global challenges with adequate language skills. The presence of visiting professors also enriches the student's learning experience, making learning more dynamic and connected to the global academic world.



Figure 1. International seminar activities

Figure 1 illustrates that the Postgraduate Program has also adopted an internationally recognized credit system. This aims to make it easier for students to transfer credits if they plan to continue their studies abroad or participate in international student exchange programs. This adjustment of the credit system

ensures that students have the opportunity to gain international academic recognition and open up wider opportunities to continue their education abroad.

This curriculum change received mixed responses from students. Most students welcomed this change because they felt they had the opportunity to study in a broader and internationally standardized academic environment. However, some students had difficulty following international classes that use English and Arabic as the languages of instruction. To overcome this, the Postgraduate Program provides academic assistance and additional English and Arabic courses so that students can adapt better and maximize the benefits of international classes.

Developing an internationally standard-based curriculum through benchmarking, course revision, and adoption of international classes demonstrates the institution's commitment to strengthening the quality of global education. This approach aims to improve graduates' competitiveness and expand academic networks with international educational institutions. Despite the challenges associated with the use of foreign languages, the steps taken by the Postgraduate Program show that they are serious about preparing students to face global academic demands.

International Cooperation and Student Mobility

The Postgraduate Program has been actively collaborating with various foreign institutions to expand academic networks and improve the quality of education. One form of cooperation is signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with several universities in Malaysia and Thailand. This cooperation encompasses student exchange programs and collaborative research initiatives that aim to provide students and lecturers with opportunities to expand their scientific horizons and enhance their academic competitiveness on a global scale.

The Director of Postgraduate Studies explained that his party had established MoUs with universities abroad to support student exchanges and joint research projects. He said, 'We have established MoUs with several universities in Malaysia and Thailand for student exchange programs and collaborative research' (P1). This demonstrates the Postgraduate Program's commitment to expanding its international network and providing opportunities for students and lecturers to engage in research and cross-country learning.

Additionally, one of the Heads of Study Programs noted that the Postgraduate Program offers various forms of support for students interested in participating in international exchange programs. 'We provide scholarships and subsidies for students who wish to participate in academic exchanges, as well as administrative guidance to make the registration process easier' (P8). This support aims to make it easier for students to access opportunities to study abroad without being constrained by financial barriers or complex bureaucracy.

The Postgraduate Program also takes strategic steps to ensure more students can participate in this international program. One of them is by providing scholarships and subsidies that can help students overcome financial constraints that may arise. This scholarship is expected to open up opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to take advantage of international experiences that enhance their academic and professional development.

In addition to scholarships, the Postgraduate Program provides administrative guidance to facilitate the student registration process, including visa processing and other academic preparations. This administrative support aims to ensure that students are both academically ready and administratively prepared to participate in an exchange program abroad. This is important so students can focus on learning without being burdened by complicated administrative procedures.

International cooperation established by the Postgraduate Program through student exchange programs and collaborative research has a positive impact on improving the quality of education and enhancing students' global insight. Support in the form of scholarships, subsidies, and administrative guidance makes it easier for students to participate in international programs, enrich their academic experience, and expand their academic networks, which can support the development of their professional careers at the global level.

Table 1. International Cooperation and Student Mobility

Aspect	Description	Impact on Students
Type of International Cooperation Program	MoU with universities in Malaysia and Thailand for student exchange and collaborative research	Opening opportunities for students to study abroad and engage in international research
Benefits for Students	Student exchange, collaborative research, and scholarships	Increasing accessibility to international programs and expanding academic
Support Provided	Opportunity to study abroad, cross-cultural experience, access to wider academic resources	Students develop global skills, adapt to new cultures, and gain broader international experience
Impact on Students	Scholarships, subsidies, administrative guidance (visa processing, academic preparation, etc.)	Reducing financial and administrative barriers, making it easier for students to participate in international programs
	Enhancement of global skills, ability to adapt to new environments, extensive international experience	Strengthening students' professional skills and preparing them for the global market

Table 1 illustrates key elements related to international collaboration and student mobility. The Postgraduate Program has established partnerships with overseas universities, as reflected in the MoUs with institutions in Malaysia and Thailand. These partnerships provide opportunities for students to engage in academic exchanges and collaborative research, which positively impact the development of their international skills and networks. These programs provide significant benefits to students, such as opportunities to gain cross-cultural experiences, expand access to global academic resources, and enhance global skills needed in the professional world. Support in the form of scholarships and subsidies helps students overcome financial barriers, while administrative guidance facilitates the administrative preparation process for participating in international programs.

Digitization and Learning Technology

The Postgraduate Program has taken strategic steps to improve academic quality by utilizing technology. One of these efforts is developing an e-learning

system that allows distance learning per international standards. This system provides flexibility for students in accessing lecture materials and participating in online discussions, which is important for improving the quality of learning at the postgraduate level. This was stated by the Deputy Director of Postgraduate Studies in an interview on November 20, 2024: 'We have developed an e-learning system that enables distance learning with international standards.'

The Deputy Director said that the latest technology, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), has been integrated into the e-learning system. AI is used to create a more interactive learning experience and provide analysis of student learning patterns and recommendations for materials that suit individual needs. "We have integrated Artificial Intelligence into the e-learning system to provide a more interactive learning experience," he said. With this technology, students can obtain lecture materials and learn more effectively and personally, according to their style and needs.

In an interview on the same day, one of the Heads of Study Programs at Postgraduate Studies added that although there has been significant progress in the implementation of technology, there are still obstacles in adapting to technology. Some students have difficulty utilizing e-learning features to the fullest, while lecturers need to adapt to more technology-based teaching methods. "There are still obstacles in adapting to technology, but we have held regular training to improve the digital skills of lecturers and students," he said. This shows the Postgraduate's commitment to facing technological challenges with a more structured approach. As part of the solution to overcome these obstacles, the Postgraduate Program has conducted routine training for lecturers and students. This training aims to improve digital skills, both for teachers and students, so that they can optimally utilize e-learning technology. According to the Head of the PGMI Study Program, this training also aims to familiarize lecturers with technology-based teaching methods and increase student participation in online learning.

On the other hand, developing this technology also encourages increased interactivity in learning. AI features like virtual assistants and material recommendations based on student learning data analysis help create a more personal and adaptive learning experience. This makes learning more effective, and students can more easily understand the material being taught, along with technological advances that are continuously updated.

The implementation of technology in the Postgraduate learning system shows a strong commitment to creating a more modern, adaptive, and competitive education on a global scale. With the presence of e-learning and AI technology, the Postgraduate Program can continue to improve academic quality, produce graduates ready to compete, and contribute to the development of higher education in Indonesia.

Discussion

This study shows that the Postgraduate Program has implemented a firm policy to improve academic quality to compete globally. The institution's vision to become a center for superior research-based Islamic education, both nationally

and internationally, reflects strategic efforts in developing the quality of education. This is in line with findings in the literature that emphasize the importance of a clear vision and policy in the development of higher education, which stated that educational policies that favor research and internationalization could strengthen the competitiveness of institutions at the global level (Buckner, 2022; Fan et al., 2022; Garwe & Thondhlana, 2022). Based on these findings, the policies implemented at the Postgraduate Program refer to best practices in international institutions, which aim to improve academic quality and develop globally relevant research

"The curriculum internationalization policy implemented by the Postgraduate Program is also in line with research conducted by Chien (2023) and Hoai et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of internationalization as one of the main strategies to improve the quality of higher education. This study found that the Postgraduate Program conducted benchmarking with universities abroad to develop a curriculum that aligns more closely with international standards. This reflects the institution's efforts to adopt global educational practices that can expand the scope and quality of education offered. In the literature, internationalization of the curriculum has been shown to enrich students' learning experiences by providing a global perspective and preparing them for global challenges (Majewska, 2023; Shahjahan et al., 2024; Sierra-Huedo et al., 2024). Thus, this policy supports efforts to create a curriculum that is more flexible and adaptive to changing times.

However, this study also highlights challenges in the adaptation of technology by students and lecturers. As explained, changes to curriculum and technology implementation require a transition process that involves ongoing training and support (Howson & Kingsbury, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2023; Alenezi, 2023). At the Postgraduate Program, although e-learning technology has been successfully integrated, some students still struggle to utilize e-learning features optimally, and lecturers must adjust their teaching methods to accommodate the technology used. This reflects the consistency of other findings that show that the adoption of technology in education cannot occur without changes in the teaching culture and readiness of teachers (Almusawi & Durugbo, 2024; Shahid et al., 2024; Stumbrienė et al., 2024).

Therefore, ongoing training for lecturers and students is key to overcoming this challenge. Related to the implementation of technology in learning, this study found that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the e-learning system significantly impacts students' learning experiences. These findings reinforce the findings of a study by Ayeni et al. (2024), which showed that AI could help create a more personalized and interactive learning experience by providing recommendations for materials tailored to individual needs and providing analysis of student learning patterns. AI enables more efficient learning by providing a virtual assistant to answer academic questions in real-time (Goudar et al., 2024; Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024), enhancing the student learning experience.

"The practical implication of these findings is that educational institutions should continue to develop AI in learning to maximize the potential of technology in higher education. Regarding international cooperation, the Postgraduate

Program has signed MoUs with several universities in Malaysia and Thailand to expand academic networks and improve the quality of education. This cooperation, which includes student exchange programs and collaborative research, aligns with findings in the literature, showing that international cooperation can enrich students' learning experiences and broaden lecturers' academic horizons (Bakay, 2023; Alexiadou et al., 2021). This study also shows that international cooperation is an important means of increasing academic competitiveness and providing opportunities for students and lecturers to engage in broader research. In this case, the Postgraduate Program utilizes international cooperation opportunities to broaden scientific insight and increase the academic capacity of their academic community.

The theoretical implication of this study is the importance of understanding that internationalization policies of curriculum and the use of technology, especially e-learning and AI, can significantly improve the quality of education. This study supports higher education theories that emphasize that a global curriculum and technology integration can enrich the learning experience and increase the competitiveness of institutions. This study provides an important contribution to the management of Islamic education, especially in managing higher education based on research and internationalization. To improve the competitiveness and quality of Islamic education at the global level, Islamic educational institutions must pay attention to the importance of developing an internationally standardized curriculum and utilizing technology optimally to create more efficient and adaptive learning.

CONCLUSION

The policy and vision of the Postgraduate Program, which focuses on improving academic quality by integrating curriculum internationalization, international cooperation, and digitalization of learning technology, has a positive impact on the quality of education and institutional competitiveness at the global level. One of the most important findings is the application of an AI-based e-learning system, which creates a more personal and interactive learning experience for students. However, challenges in adapting technology still need to be overcome. The wisdom of this study is the importance of policies that are adaptive to global developments and the need for ongoing support in technology training for lecturers and students to optimize the use of digital platforms. This study has limitations in terms of the scope and time, which only focuses on one institution. Further research can be conducted by expanding the sample to various universities in Indonesia and abroad to analyze the impact of policies more comprehensively and evaluate the implementation of learning technology in a broader context.

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