

## IMPROVING THE QUALITY AND ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION: FROM COLLEGE TO STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

*This study aims to evaluate the improvement of quality and accessibility of Islamic education through the transformation from Islamic Higher Education Institutions to State Islamic Universities. Using a qualitative approach through literature review and in-depth interviews, this research finds that the development of an integrative and adaptive curriculum to contemporary needs is crucial for enhancing the quality of education in Islamic higher education institutions. Additionally, reforms in management and institutional governance also play a significant role in supporting the mission of community empowerment. The study concludes that the synergy between curriculum innovation and institutional renewal can strengthen the role of Islamic higher education institutions in shaping a competitive and morally upright generation.*

**Keywords:** *Quality Improvement; Education Accessibility; State Islamic Universities; Curriculum Innovation; Community Empowerment.*

### INTRODUCTION

This research uses a qualitative approach to examine and explore in-depth the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education: From Islamic Colleges to State Islamic Universities. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to gather rich and contextual information about the ideas that led to the establishment of Islamic colleges within a complex historical setting. This approach enables a thorough analysis of the context of the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education as it exists today.

This research will involve a literature review, using the literature study method to examine and explore more deeply the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education: From Islamic Colleges to State Islamic Universities.

The research data is obtained from various data sources. The data sources used in this study consist of primary data sources (research results, research reports, academic journals, etc.) and secondary data sources (laws, books, etc.). The data collection technique in this study uses the Library Study method. A literature study is the process of conducting a general review of previously published works related to various topics. Through this literature study method, a fundamental knowledge base of the selected topic can be established. The data collection technique involves searching for relevant literature, reviewing the validity of the literature, aligning the content with the topic being discussed, and finally creating a framework and writing the scientific paper.

The data analysis technique used in this study is content analysis, where the data is classified, reduced, and interpreted to identify the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education: From Islamic Colleges to State Islamic Universities. Data from various literatures are analyzed to uncover the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach to examine and explore in-depth the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education: From Islamic Colleges to State Islamic Universities. The qualitative approach is chosen because it allows the researcher to gather rich and contextual information about the ideas that led to the establishment of Islamic colleges within a complex historical setting. This approach enables a thorough analysis of the context of the Improvement of Quality and Accessibility of Islamic Education as it exists today.

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## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Basis for Curriculum Development

The term *curriculum* comes from the Latin word "curriculum," which means a running course or race course, especially a chariot race course, and it also appears in French as "courier," meaning to run. The term was later used to refer to a series of courses or subjects that must be completed in order to achieve a degree or diploma. In Arabic, the term curriculum is often referred to as *al-manhaj*. In this context, Mohammad al-Toumy al-Syaibani explains as follows:

Regarding the concept of curriculum in education, when we refer to Arabic dictionaries, the word *manhaj* (curriculum) means a clear path or the straight way that people follow in various aspects of life.

Given the various meanings of the term *curriculum*, from a linguistic perspective, it can be understood as a plan or outline for teaching that makes the direction of educational activities clear and apparent. This definition is related to the most prominent aspect of the curriculum, which is the arrangement of subjects or materials that will be used as a reference in educational activities.

From a linguistic standpoint, the term *curriculum* is not only used for educational activities but also for other activities. In other words, every activity in life has its own curriculum (M. Hanafi, 2014).

Additionally, the concept of curriculum is also addressed by educational experts, which can generally be distinguished into narrow and broader definitions. One narrow definition, as stated by Crow and Crow, refers to the design of teaching that consists of a series of subjects systematically arranged as requirements for completing a specific educational program.

A standard curriculum across all faculties, departments, and study programs, including the preparation of teaching models and evaluation, as well as the development of human resources in lecturers who understand the spirit of Muhammadiyah's struggle, is crucial to preparing future human resources with a good understanding of religion, a strong spirit to implement religion in all aspects of professional and social life, and the ability to set a good example for students and peers, thus contributing positively to campus culture to support the success of Islamic and Muhammadiyah education (Andriyani, 2014).

This opinion is supported by Muhammad Ali Khalil, who states that the curriculum is a set of plans and media to guide educational institutions in achieving the desired educational goals.

According to Nasution, the old definition of curriculum emphasized the content of lessons or courses, referring to the subjects or courses in schools or universities that must be completed to achieve a diploma or degree. It also refers to the overall lessons presented by an educational institution (M. Hanafi, 2014).

Education aims to help students develop their human potential. A teacher's task can only be performed if they have a clear understanding of who humans really are. In reality, many teachers still do not understand who humans truly are and what inherent characteristics distinguish humans from animals. As a result, educational outcomes are often not satisfactory. Seeing this reality, the author believes there is a need to discuss human nature and its development in education (Arif, 2021).

The curriculum is dynamic and must always be developed to keep pace with the progress and challenges of the times. Curriculum development must be conducted systematically and purposefully, with a clear vision and mission of where national education is heading in the future with the development of that curriculum.

### **1. Principles of Curriculum Development**

In curriculum development, curriculum developers generally use several principles as guidelines to ensure that the curriculum meets the expectations of education stakeholders, including students, schools, parents, society, graduates' employers, and the government. Essentially, the principles used in curriculum development serve as the foundation that embodies the curriculum.

There are several principles commonly used in curriculum development. However, this article focuses on two principles: Relevance and Continuity. Below is a further explanation:

### **2. Principle of Relevance**

According to the Oxford Advanced Dictionary of Current English, as cited by Abdullah Idi, the word *relevance* means "connected with what is happening," or having a close relationship with current events. In the context of education, relevance refers to the alignment or compatibility of education with the demands of life. Education is considered relevant if its outcomes are useful for life, both for the individual and society. In other words, the curriculum and teaching must be designed to meet the needs and life demands of students.

According to E. Mulyasa in his book *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan Sebuah Panduan Praktis*, curriculum development should consider and focus on the development of personal integrity, spiritual intelligence, thinking skills, social creativity, academic abilities, and vocational skills.

There are two types of relevance that a curriculum must have:

- a. External Relevance, meaning that the goals, content, and learning processes included in the curriculum should be aligned with the demands, needs, and developments of society. What is included in the curriculum should prepare students to live and work in society, not only for the present but also for the future.
- b. Internal Relevance, meaning there is consistency or alignment between the components of the curriculum itself, including goals, content, teaching processes, and assessment. Internal relevance shows the integration of the curriculum.

## **B. Integration of General Knowledge and Islamic Studies**

In Western intellectual tradition, science has several characteristics that make it known as knowledge, namely: activity, methods, and knowledge. The breakdown of science into activities, methods, and knowledge are not contradictory but form an integrated unity that must exist in a sequential manner. Science must be pursued through human activities, and these activities must be carried out through specific methods, so that activities performed using these methods become knowledge (Riyan Syahputra, 2022).

Science is essentially a series of activities conducted by scientists using reasoning, involving understanding and knowledge, and aiming to achieve specific goals. More precisely, science is directed toward objectives desired by scientists. In general, science is developed by scientists to reach a certain truth.

From this truth, many things about the universe, events in society, and human behavior are revealed. According to The Liang Gie, scientists use a natural system to achieve truth in their activities. The implementation of methods usually follows certain patterns, such as conducting interviews and making calculations.

Al-Ghazali divided knowledge into two types: *fardhu 'ain* (religious knowledge) and *fardhu kifayah* (non-religious knowledge). *Fardhu 'ain* refers to the obligation of every individual, a personal or individual duty, which becomes a priority in studying knowledge. Meanwhile, *fardhu kifayah* refers to the obligation of a group, where it must be carried out by some members; if no one fulfills it, the entire group is considered at fault.

It can be interpreted that religious knowledge must be mastered by every individual, as it is a personal obligation. Once religious knowledge is learned, one may proceed to study other fields of knowledge. This concept, however, has often been misunderstood or misinterpreted. Many people prioritize religious knowledge and neglect non-religious knowledge.

When this theory is misinterpreted, it leads to the absence of space for non-religious knowledge to develop within Islamic institutions. The method of acquiring knowledge is called epistemology. From the Islamic perspective, there are two viewpoints on epistemology: the first is through human effort, and the second is through what is granted by Allah SWT. Knowledge acquired through human effort is categorized into four types: through the senses, senses and reason, reason alone, and through the heart (qalb). The knowledge granted by Allah

SWT comes through revelation to the prophets, inspiration received by human reason, and guidance granted to the human heart (Riyan Syahputra, 2022).

In the development of Islamic knowledge, there is a distinction between religious knowledge and general knowledge. This implicitly indicates the existence of a dichotomy in knowledge. Such a condition has persisted since the medieval period of Islamic history and continues to this day. In Indonesia, this dichotomy between general knowledge and religious knowledge has even been institutionalized. This can be observed in the existence of two types of educational institutions, each under different departments: religious institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (DEPAG), and general educational institutions under the Ministry of Education and Culture (DEPDIKNAS).

The dichotomous view of Islamic knowledge is inconsistent with the integralistic view of knowledge at the beginning of Islamic history. It turns out that the dichotomous view, which places Islam as a discipline separate from other fields of knowledge, has led to the stagnation of Muslim scholars, both in expanding their knowledge and in solving problems with a multidimensional approach. Therefore, it is understandable that this dichotomy has faced criticism from society, including challenges from Muslim scholars through the discourse of the Islamization of knowledge (Chaeruddin, 2016).

The integration of knowledge is also encouraged by the view that Muslims need to master scientific knowledge in order to prepare graduates from Islamic educational institutions to enter the workforce. Furthermore, the integration of knowledge is intended to foster openness among Muslims toward various other disciplines. Thus, the integration of knowledge will produce moderate Islamic thinkers, leading to moderation in religious practice. Consequently, various issues of religious moderation can be integrated into the focus of education and other educational activities, such as research in the fields of social sciences, which include social, economic, political, artistic, cultural, and educational studies, as well as in the field of science. By integrating knowledge, research is expected to cultivate values of religious pluralism and the integration of Islam and general knowledge within Islamic educational institutions. For example, the direction and policies for the development of religious moderation, as developed by Islamic Higher Education in the National Religious Research Agenda (ARKAN) 2018-2028, in accordance with the Decree of the Director General of Islamic Education Number 6994 of 2018 (Sagaf, 2022).

### **C. The Role of Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Community Empowerment**

Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) play a crucial role in shaping the character and morals of society through in-depth religious education. Understanding Allah's teachings in life should not stop at the pillars of Islam (shahada, prayer, fasting, zakat, and hajj), nor should it be limited to merely good ethics. It must also encompass understanding and applying Allah's teachings on how to manage society, the nation, and the state according to divine guidance, including issues related to culture, economy, politics, and law (Marzuki, 1997).

PTKI also contributes through community service activities such as KKN/KKM (Community Service and Field Work) carried out by students to support programs intended for the community. These programs aim to improve the quality of life and address social issues (Muhammad Rudi Wijaya, 2022).

PTKI serves as the front line in building democracy in Indonesia. The democratic life amid Indonesia's diversity—encompassing not only territorial, ethnic, and socio-cultural aspects

but also religious diversity—can be built with love and peace within the framework of national consciousness based on Pancasila (Suwendi, 2020).

PTKI also plays a role in empowering the economy through various entrepreneurial programs and the development of small and medium enterprises. PTKI assists the community in developing business skills and accessing the necessary resources to start and expand businesses.

The community empowerment process emphasizes building the community from within. This is done by rediscovering and applying the noble values the community already possesses but has struggled to implement, leading to the destruction of social capital and resulting in multidimensional damage, including the disempowerment and fragmentation of society (Muhammad Rudi Wijaya, 2022).

PTKI provides quality education and training for the community. Through formal and non-formal education programs, PTKI helps improve the knowledge and skills of the community, enabling them to become more independent and productive.

Empowerment is an idea that arose from the growing advancement of Western thought and social culture, particularly in Europe. This concept emerged in the 1970s and continued to develop into the present. It coincided with the rise of popular philosophical schools, such as existentialism, phenomenology, and personalism. Later, it was seen as an extension of the thinking of neo-Marxism, Freudianism, structuralism, and the Frankfurt School. Along with this, concepts such as elites, authority, anti-establishment, populist action, anti-structure, legality, liberation ideology, and civil society emerged. The concept of empowerment is also considered part of the postmodernist movement, which emerged in the mid-20th century, emphasizing behaviors and views that oppose systems, structures, and determinism within power circles. Community empowerment terminology became popular in Indonesia in the 1980s. Initially, it was known for the empowerment programs implemented by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), but now it has become a community empowerment framework adopted by government institutions to reduce poverty (Rimanto, 2021).

Social transformation in the digital era presents significant challenges and opportunities in various aspects of community life. Advances in information and communication technology have changed the way individuals interact, work, and access information.

The main challenges of this transformation include the widening digital divide, concerns about personal data security, and the potential loss of jobs due to automation and artificial intelligence. Additionally, the negative impacts on mental health and rapid social change are also important issues.

However, there are also significant opportunities that can be leveraged to improve quality of life, accelerate economic development, and strengthen social participation. These opportunities include increased access to education through digital platforms, the creation of new jobs in the technology sector, and easier community empowerment through social media and technology-based applications. With an inclusive approach and adaptive policies, social transformation in the digital era can create sustainable positive impacts for the global community (Saebani, 2024).

Indirectly, disruption forces people to prepare for these changes, transforming the challenges of disruption into opportunities in the disruption era. Not everyone views disruption as a phenomenon that presents opportunities; some see it as a threat. This is because disruption

represents a phenomenon where society shifts activities once conducted directly (in the real world) to being done indirectly (in the virtual world).

Nevertheless, whatever happens and whatever the view of society regarding the disruption era, it is inevitable. One cannot blame the situation without making an effort to formulate strategies to survive in the chaos of the disruption era. Seeing the rapid technological advances that have already become part of the changes to come, both positive and negative impacts are inevitable. Both complement and provide alternative solutions. The technological advancements referred to as the era of disruption do not only affect industries but also education, which should be prioritized. Of course, the challenges that arise should create opportunities for the common good. In response to this, the question is what makes digital transformation both an opportunity and a challenge in the educational world, particularly for educators and students, and whether digital transformation significantly impacts the educational world (Fadiya, 2022).

Another fundamental issue, no less important, is the fact that many religious preachers still lack a clear understanding of their preaching targets. Even though they may possess extensive religious knowledge, their approach to delivering messages may not suit the characteristics of the target audience. Communities often have different problems, cultures, and characteristics. However, many preachers continue to deliver the same messages to all audiences, without considering the specific context of the audience. This “cassette culture,” where the same preaching material is delivered everywhere, to everyone, without attention to the audience’s conditions, remains common. If this approach continues without development, the goals of preaching will be difficult to achieve effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

The transformation from Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Sekolah Tinggi Islam) to State Islamic Universities (UIN) is a strategic step aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of Islamic education in Indonesia. This transformation process involves various aspects, including curriculum development, human resource improvement, and the utilization of technology.

This research finds that the transformation has had a significant positive impact on the quality of education. A more holistic and integrative curriculum has been able to address the dualism in knowledge, producing graduates who are not only competent in Islamic studies but also possess knowledge and skills relevant to contemporary developments.

Additionally, this transformation has also expanded access to higher education for the community. With the status of a university, UIN has a larger capacity to admit new students, provide more comprehensive facilities, and offer a broader range of study programs. This opens up opportunities for more young people to receive quality education.

However, this research also identifies several challenges that need to be addressed, such as limited resources, resistance to change, and the digital divide. Therefore, a comprehensive and collaborative strategy is needed to overcome these challenges and ensure the success of the transformation.

Overall, the transformation from Islamic Higher Education Institutions to State Islamic Universities is the right step to improve the quality and accessibility of Islamic education. With support from various stakeholders, it is expected that this transformation can make a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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