



## Modernization of Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia at A Glance: Barriers and Opportunities

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### **Abstract**

The problem of modernization of Islamic higher education in Indonesia has been long debated among experts. Some of them agree that Islamic higher education is left behind compared to general or non-Islamic higher education, whereas middle-class muslim society in Indonesia has increased. This article tries to explain the latest development of Islamic higher education in Indonesia and identify key issues that hamper the modernization of Islamic education. The data are collected from selected documents, articles, and recent research from experts. Modernization of Islamic higher educations can be done through strengthening institutions' capacity, improving the quality of human resources, improving student activities, and upgrading research and publication especially in the field of applied sciences.

**Keywords:** *Modernization; Islamic Higher Education; Indonesia*

### **A. Introduction**

The modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia has been a concern of researchers since at least three decades ago (Boland, 1971; Djuwaeli, 1998; Azra, 1999; & Fadjar, 1999). This idea appears for various reasons, but in general it is based on the view that the role of Islamic education is decreasing in the context of Indonesian education as a whole, both in quality and quantity. The data exhibits that the interest of Indonesian Muslims to send their children to Islamic education institutions has decreased (Research Team, 2011). The growth of Islamic education providers has not changed much in the last three decades.

Recently, the demands for the modernization of Islamic education are not only aimed at the primary and secondary education levels, but also at Islamic tertiary institutions. Lukens-Bull calls Islamic higher education in Indonesia at a crossroads: between opening up and adopting general subjects to expand access and markets; or keep only presenting Islamic subjects at the risk of losing their role in the national education arena. Therefore, modernization or reorientation is a must (Lukens-Bull, 2013).

In line with the development of science and problems in an increasingly complex society, various components of Islamic education such as curriculum, teacher functions, teaching materials, teaching and

learning processes, teaching media, evaluation, management, environment, patterns of teacher-student relationships, education costs and so on must be reorganized (Sunanto, 2005).

Islamic education is the process of forming individuals based on Islamic teachings to achieve a high degree so that they are able to carry out the function of their caliphate (Sunanto, 2005). Islamic education is also defined as an effort that is more specifically emphasized to develop the religious nature of students so that they are better to understand, appreciate and practice Islamic teachings. (Ahmadi, 2005) Another expert states that Islamic education includes three definitions. First, Islamic education is education according to Islam or Islamic education, which is education that is understood and developed from the teachings and values of the al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah. Second, Islamic education is Islamic education or Islamic religious education, which is an effort to educate Islam or its teachings and values, so that it becomes one's outlook and attitude in life. Third, Islamic education is education in Islam, or the process and practice of education that takes place and develops in the historical reality of Muslims (Muhaimin, 2003).

From the definitions presented above, it can be emphasized that Islamic education is a process of study, learning, and the inheritance of knowledge and values that originate from the teachings of al-Qur'an and al-Sunnah so that they are understood and implemented in everyday life. Thus, the output expected from Islamic education is a person who is knowledgeable and has good character so that he is able to realize an Islam that is *rahmatan lil alamin*.

Modernization can be interpreted as a process of shifting attitudes and mentality as citizens of society to be able to live in accordance with the demands of the present. Modernization of Islamic higher education can thus be interpreted as a process of change that occurs in the Islamic higher education environment which is carried out using new approaches, methods, techniques and ideas that are more in line with the demands of today's society.

A number of experts agree that the changing form of Islamic tertiary institutions from the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) to the State Islamic University (UIN) which occurred in the last two decades is one of the forms of modernization that is taking place in the environment of Islamic higher education. Hefner called the change process as "the most forward-looking in the entire Muslim world". What is meant by modernization is the decision of state Islamic universities to overhaul their curriculum by opening general study programs (general subjects or non-religious subjects) and what is no less important is opening a program of Islamic studies in the fields of history, philosophy, and comparative religion to complement its classical Islamic studies (Hefner, 2008). The advantage of this transformation is not only to produce graduates who are more competitive in the market, but also to foster innovation and new ideas from various sources and scientific traditions, including from the United States and European countries (Tan, 2012).

The roots of the renewal of Islamic education that occurred since the late 1990s can actually be traced to the two previous decades, when a number of alumni of Islamic education in Indonesia had the opportunity to undertake further studies in North American and European countries. (Lukens-Bull, 2013) McGill University (in Montreal, Canada) which has the Institute of Islamic Studies is one of the colleges that accommodates many postgraduate students from Indonesia. To mention several names: Mukti Ali, Munawir Sjadzali, Harun Nasution, Nurcholish Madjid, A. Malik Fadjar, Azyumardi Azra are some examples of alumni of Islamic education who received further education in the West. When they returned to Indonesia, they became important figures who supported the openness of Islamic higher education institutions to open studies of general subjects. Some of them held important positions such as Minister of Religion, Minister of Education, and Chancellor of state Islamic universities. Furthermore, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta can be called the pioneer of the inclusion of general science into Islamic educational institutions. The university is developing collaborations in the field of research and human resources with

a number of well-known universities in the United States, Canada and Europe to catch up with public universities.

If it is traced further, the idea of combining religious and general knowledge in Islamic tertiary institutions has actually appeared since 1945. Mohammad Hatta during his speech at the establishment of the Islamic High School (STI) in Jakarta, July 8, 1945, stated, "In STI it will be a meeting religion with science in an atmosphere of cooperation to guide society towards prosperity" (MD, 1987). However, in its physical implementation at that time, STI only offered a major in religious studies. When the government opened a number of IAINs in the 1960s, the desire to open general science majors among Islamic universities continued to grow. However, the national education policy during the New Order did not allow IAIN and Islamic tertiary institutions under the guidance of the Ministry of Religion to open general fields of study. This old wish was only realized in the reform era. In 2002, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah (Jakarta) changed its name to Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University and offers a number of general study programs to the public. Several other IAINs later changed to UIN, such as UIN Bandung, UIN Yogyakarta, UIN Malang, UIN Makasar, UIN Pekanbaru, and others.

According to Azra, the toughest and most eternal challenge in the context of modernizing Islamic higher education is integrating religious (Islam) and general subjects into the educational curriculum (Azra, 2014). This process not only requires a complete overhaul of the curriculum content being taught, but also requires a deep scientific philosophy study so that each discipline offered has a solid scientific and Islamic foundation, as well as changes at the faculty level and the study programs offered.

Modernization in the field of Islamic education must be directed towards providing the widest possible room for movement to the essential functions of education. (Fadjar, 1999) Thus, educational institutions such as Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Mathla'ul Anwar no longer only enjoy the accepted quantitative role, but more importantly gain qualitative influence. It must be admitted that the Islamic institutions that administered education were late in starting the qualitative tradition. This is different from Christian schools that started a qualitative tradition since the colonial era which politically received support from the colonial government through its discriminatory politics.

The decision to open a general study program within UIN is not without criticism. Within the UIN itself (Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Surabaya and Malang) (Lukens-Bull, 2013) there was a debate among lecturers that opening a general study program would further distance UIN from education based on Islamic values and marginalizing religious study programs. as the forerunner of UIN. More harsh criticism even accused UIN of apostasy (Jaiz, 2005), because it was pointed out that many UIN teachers and alumni had deviated from Islamic teachings. Based on the aforementioned background, this paper seeks to answer the main questions: What are the problems faced in modernizing Islamic higher education in Indonesia today, and what are the prospects?

## ***B. Methodology***

This article uses a qualitative study based on books and previous research results as a source of data, enriched with several sources from the internet in the form of e-books, e-journals, as well as quotes from relevant websites. The sites [www.ristekdikti.go.id](http://www.ristekdikti.go.id) and [www.pendis.kemenag.go.id](http://www.pendis.kemenag.go.id) are the main sources of searching for data on universities in Indonesia. According to Denzin (1981) in (Moleong, 1989), analysis and verification of article data is carried out using triangulation techniques based on data sources, where each proposed thought and discussion is supported by at least two different sources in the form of previous writings or research.

### ***C. Finding and Discussion***

#### **1. Definition of Islamic Higher Education**

Education is defined as a conscious and planned effort to create an atmosphere of learning and the learning process so that students actively develop their potential to have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, and skills needed by themselves, society, nation and state (Article 1 of Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System). Whereas, higher education is the level of education after secondary education which includes diploma programs, undergraduate programs, master programs, doctoral programs, and professional programs, as well as specialist programs, which are organized by higher education institutions based on Indonesian culture (Article 1 of Law No.12 of 2012 on Education High). Based on the law, the responsibility for planning, regulating, monitoring, evaluating, developing and coordinating higher education lies with the ministry in charge of higher education, namely the Ministry of Research and Higher Education.

Specifically, for the implementation of higher religious education, responsibilities, duties and authorities are carried out by the minister who holds government affairs in the religious sector (Article 7 of Law No.12 of 2012). Therefore, the regulation and supervision of Islamic universities in Indonesia, both public and private Islamic universities, is carried out by the Ministry of Religion through the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education. Meanwhile, the regulation and supervision of public, public and private universities is carried out by the Ministry of Research and Higher Education.

The history of Islamic higher education in Indonesia generally refers to the Islamic College (STI) which was established in Padang on December 9, 1940 and is considered the first Islamic university. (Boland, 1971) This college initially opened two departments, namely Sharia and Language Education. Arabic, and aims to educate religious scholars and teachers in madrassas.

In 1951 the State Islamic College (PTAIN) was established in Yogyakarta with the aim of "providing higher teaching and becoming a center for developing and deepening knowledge of Islam." In 1957, the Academy of Religious Sciences (ADIA) was established in Jakarta with a vision "to educate and prepare civil servants who will achieve semi-academy and academy education diplomas to become religious educators in secondary schools, both general and vocational and religion." (Minhaji, 2007) PTAIN and ADIA later merged into the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) which was inaugurated on August 24, 1960 in Yogyakarta. Just like its predecessor colleges, IAIN's field of work was limited to providing higher teaching and becoming a center for developing and deepening knowledge of Islam.

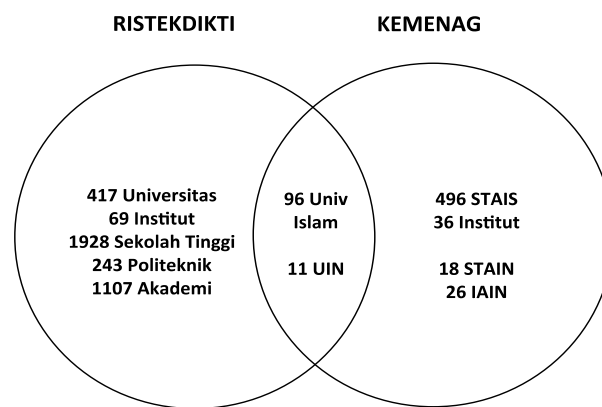
During the New Order era, a number of IAINs and STAINs were established in various cities. Currently, the state Islamic religious higher education institution (PTAIN) consists of three different types of institutions. (Lukens-Bull, 2013) The smallest is the State Islamic College (STAIN), which is a higher education institution that only consists of one or two faculties. Historically, many STAINs were originally campus branches of larger institutions. The medium size campus is usually called the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) which usually has at least four or five faculties, namely: Tarbiyah (Islamic Teaching), Sharia (Islamic Law), Ushuluddin (Theology), Da'wah (Mission), and Adab (Islamic Civilization)). The largest campus is the State Islamic University (UIN) which has organized non-religious faculties and study programs. In contrast to STAIN and IAIN, UIN although structurally under the Ministry of Religion, from the aspect of regulation and supervision must submit to the authority of the Ministry of Research and Higher Education because it organizes faculties and general study programs. Across Indonesia, there are currently 18 STAINs, 26 IAINs, and 11 UINs.

The Private Islamic Religious College (PTKIS) also consists of three different institutions. The Private Islamic College (STAIS) is an Islamic higher education institution that consists of only one or two faculties. The institute usually has three or four faculties. There is also a Faculty of Islamic Religion

(FAI) which is usually part of a public university under the Ministry of Research and Higher Education. Based on data from the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education, currently there are 496 STAIS, 36 Islamic Religious Institutes, and 96 FAIs in public universities. Like UIN, public private universities that organize religious studies programs are under the regulation and supervision of two ministries, namely the Ministry of Research and Higher Education (for general study programs) and the Ministry of Religion (for religious studies programs).

Currently, there are 4,447 tertiary institutions in Indonesia, consisting of 541 universities, 131 institutes, 2,424 tertiary institutions, 243 polytechnics, and 1,107 academies. Of these, there are 683 Islamic tertiary institutions (15.4 percent), including private universities managed by Islamic educational organizations / institutions / foundations / institutions.

To supervise and develop private universities, the government assists the Coordinator of Private Higher Education (Kopertis) for public universities; as well as the Coordinator of Private Islamic Higher Education (Kopertais) for private Islamic universities. The supervision of academic quality through an accreditation system for all higher education in Indonesia is carried out by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT), a government agency established through the Ministry of Research and Higher Education.



**Figure 1.** Number of Universities in Indonesia

By paying attention to the history of the development and existence of higher education institutions in Indonesia today, the notion of Islamic higher education institutions is not sufficient to only refer to universities that are under the regulation and supervision of the Ministry of Religion, but also must include private universities established and managed by Islamic foundations, which generally have both a general study program and an Islamic study program.

## 2. The Problem of Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia

Many parties admit that Islamic universities in Indonesia are lagging behind compared to non-Islamic universities. In the list of higher education rankings issued by the Ministry of Research and Technology and Higher Education (2016), not a single Islamic university was included in the top 10 list, not even in the top 20. The best ranking for Islamic tertiary institutions was achieved by the University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM) which was ranked 26th based on the assessment of Research and Technology and Higher Education.

**Tabel 1.** Top 10 Universities in Indonesia

No	The Rank based on Ristek & Dikti	No	University Rank Based on Web Ranking
1	Institut Teknologi Bandung	1	Universitas Gadjah Mada
2	Universitas Gadjah Mada	2	Universitas Indonesia
3	Institut Pertanian Bogor	3	Universitas Sebelas Maret
4	Universitas Indonesia	4	Institut Teknologi Bandung
5	Institut Teknologi 10 Nopember	5	Universitas Diponegoro
6	Universitas Brawijaya	6	Universitas Padjadjaran
7	Universitas Padjadjaran	7	Universitas Brawijaya
8	Universitas Airlangga	8	Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
9	Universitas Sevelas Maret	9	Institut Pertanian Bogor
10	Universitas Diponegoro	10	Universitas Mercu Buana
<b>26</b>	<b>Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>Universitas Islam Indonesia</b>

The ranking issued by the University Web also provides a similar picture: there is no Islamic university in Indonesia that is in the top 20 based on the popularity of its website. The best ranking was achieved by the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII) which was ranked 22 in terms of the popularity of its website. Web rankings may not describe the true quality of higher education institutions because the assessment indicators are only one aspect, but this ranking at least describes the position of Islamic universities in terms of the use of internet technology, which is currently one of the important instruments in the supervision and evaluation of higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Another indicator to capture the condition of Islamic tertiary institutions can be seen from its accreditation ranking. Within the State Islamic Higher Education (PTAIN), only 941 study programs (87.8 percent) were accredited from the existing 1071 study programs. While the remaining 133 study programs (12.2 percent) have not been accredited or have expired accredited. Of all accredited PTAIN study programs, only 142 study programs (13.2 percent) were accredited with rank A, while the other 589 study programs (55.0 percent) were accredited B, and 210 study programs (19.6 percent) were accredited C.

The environment of the Private Islamic Religious College (PTKIS) described a lower quality than PTAIN. Only 1116 study programs (75.3 percent) were accredited out of a total of 1481 study programs. While the remaining 365 study programs (24.7 percent) have not been accredited and have expired accredited. Of all accredited study programs, only 26 study programs (2.3 percent) were accredited with A rank, while the other 444 study programs (39.8 percent) were B accredited, and more than half of 646 study programs (57.8 percent) were C accredited.

The gap between general and religious study programs in Islamic tertiary institutions is illustrated by the ratio of tuition fees set. Higher education institutions in Indonesia generally set the highest tuition fees for the fields of study they are most interested in (for example: medical, engineering, and so on). Meanwhile, the less desirable study programs are charged the lowest fees. The religious study program at UIN Jakarta only charges IDR 16 million for the entire 8 semester study period, the lowest among all study programs. Meanwhile, the social study program at the same tertiary institution is subject to a tariff of Rp. 25.2 million and the engineering study program of Rp. 26.8 million. The same thing also happened at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang, one of the best private universities, where the religion study program is subject to a tariff of Rp. 42 million, lower than the social study program (Rp. 47 million) and the engineering study program (Rp. 52 million).

In comparison, leading private universities such as Petra Christian University (Surabaya) charge Rp. 118 million for social study programs and Rp. 128 million for engineering study programs. Meanwhile, Pelita Harapan University (Jakarta) sets a fee of IDR 149 million for the social study program and IDR 135 million for the engineering study program. The tuition fees set by leading (non-Islamic)

tertiary institutions are about double the tuition fees at the State University of Indonesia, where most of its operational needs come from the state budget. The low tuition fees set in Islamic tertiary institutions illustrate the market share that comes from the middle to lower economic groups. Meanwhile, the middle and upper economic groups have the option of applying to the best private universities with the consequence of paying higher fees.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Tuition Fees (Million IDR)

<b>Program</b>	<b>UIN Jkt</b>	<b>UMM</b>	<b>UI</b>	<b>UKP</b>	<b>UPH</b>
Religion	16.0	42.0	-	-	-
Social	25.2	47.0	40.0	118.0	149.0
Engineering	26.8	52.0	60.0	128.0	135.0

By having relatively low tuition fees, Islamic tertiary institutions generally have low accumulated costs, so that the ability to develop facilities, improve the quality of lecturers, and conduct research is limited. Islamic tertiary institutions need to be creative in finding sources of funding outside of funds from students and government assistance (if any), as has been started, among others, by UMM.

The results of research on a number of STAINs show that the problems faced by Islamic universities in Indonesia generally revolve around the limited quality of human resources, lack of supporting facilities (libraries, laboratories, conference rooms, etc.), weakness in the field of institutional management and research activities. Researcher, (2011) The problems faced by the Private Religion Islamic College (STAIS) are even more serious. With funding sources that rely almost entirely on income from students, almost no STAIS is economically independent and has sufficient funds to build facilities equivalent to modern universities. Many Islamic colleges have fewer than 1,000 students, are generally located far from big cities, and can only survive because their carers have a high spirit of dedication.

Last year the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education issued a list of 243 problem universities, of which 41 universities (16.8 percent) are private Islamic universities. The tertiary institution is considered not to report its academic activities to the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, does not have enough teaching staff according to their fields, and is considered to have violated applicable regulations.

### 3. Prospects for Modernization of Islamic Higher Education

The aim of Islamic higher education is to produce graduates who have qualified scientific qualifications and are able to apply Islamic values in various fields of life in society. The choice to open general study programs seems to be a necessity if Islamic universities want to maintain their existence in society. Viewed from a scientific perspective, there are at least two models of modernization carried out by Islamic universities. First, which tries to combine the general study program and the religion study program. Second, still separate the general study program and the religion study program, but add religious content to the curriculum.

Some Islamic universities try to carry out research activities from an Islamic perspective, while their fields of study may include general subjects such as social, economic, law, or science. The postgraduate program of Islamic Studies at UIN Jakarta can be cited as an example of how an Islamic perspective is applied in general research activities. Another model developed in research activities is the contextualization (not only textual) of the study of religious issues, taking into account the current issues (current affairs) that occur in society today. Research like this can produce a combination of religious and applied sciences.

**Table 4.** Modernization Model of Islamic Higher Education

<b>Scientific Perspectives</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Research</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Combining general study program and religion study program</li> <li>• Separating general study program and religion study program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adding Islamic content, including through extra-curricular activities</li> <li>• Does not add Islamic material</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducting Research on various general subject areas from an Islamic perspective</li> <li>• Contextualization of research on religious issues</li> <li>• Conventional research (positivism)</li> </ul>

The path of modernization that has been shown by UIN has been quite successful in enhancing the image of Islamic tertiary institutions, thereby increasing public interest in sending their children to these institutions. In the case of UIN Jakarta, this modernization has also been accompanied by the renewal of almost all physical suggestions ranging from lecture rooms, laboratories, libraries and student activity centers with financial assistance from the Islamic Development Bank. The problem is that not all Islamic universities have the capacity and opportunity to carry out transformation by opening a general study program such as UIN. Smaller Islamic universities, especially those with private status, face serious problems and limited options for being able to modernize into modern universities. Funding difficulties are often the cause of the failure of a number of programs that have been planned with great difficulty.

However, several modernization strategies can be implemented without the need for large costs. First, the research orientation changes from textual to contextual. This requires skills in the field of research, mastery of applied research methods and simple case studies, while maintaining scientific principles. Instead of doing a textual analysis of classic books that people rarely read, for example, students of religious studies programs can try out simple learning methods that suit the conditions of local students. Collaboration with lower educational institutions for research and learning activities, as well as with mosques and other social institutions, is a must for an Islamic university. Islamic universities must no longer be isolated from the surrounding community. Likewise, student activities must be carried out within the framework of interaction with the environment. Students must master basic skills in the religious and social fields, such as lecturing in majelis taklim, khutbah jum'at, becoming congregational prayer leaders, organizing youth activities.

Second, publication of research papers in print and online journals, at home and abroad. This is one of the main weaknesses in the Islamic higher education environment today, the scarcity of lecturers and students who have the skills to write articles. However, this scarcity is not because they do not master the topic to be written about, but rather because they do not master the methodology and do not have sufficient material from the research results that can be reported. Therefore, research publication activities must be part of a reorientation of field research activities directed towards applied and case studies using simple methods. The chosen journal does not need to have a high reputation, it is enough that its credibility is recognized and qualifies as a scientific journal. The publication of research results will have a dual effect on the lecturers and Islamic tertiary institutions concerned, as well as open the possibility of international cooperation with other more advanced universities.

Third, to seriously fulfill the teaching staff needs according to the standards set by the government. Many Islamic universities face the shortage of qualified human resources, especially those with private status. Meanwhile, the government is increasingly improving the control and qualification standards of teachers in higher education, which are difficult to meet by lower class private universities. Without having qualified human resources, it is impossible for private universities to achieve high accreditation ratings. The three alternative strategies mentioned above certainly need to be accompanied by improved management and increased institutional capacity, so that Islamic tertiary institutions are managed professionally, accountably and transparently. The availability of internet technology that is getting cheaper and reaches remote areas needs to be optimally utilized to prove that Islamic universities can compete with other universities.



## Conclusion

Modernization is an inevitable demand if Islamic universities are to increase their influence in society. Without any significant changes, Islamic universities will be increasingly abandoned in the midst of such rapid changes in society. Increasing institutional capacity, improving the quality of human resources, reorienting student activities, and increasing research and publication activities are some of the modernization strategies that can be carried out by Islamic universities.

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