

Assessing the Quality of Islamic Education and Challenges for UIN Raden Fatah Palembang in Achieving World-Class University Status

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ABSTRACT

In the face of global competition, a professional, competent, and skilled workforce is essential for success in the ASEAN labor market. UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, as one of the leading higher education institutions in South Sumatra, holds significant potential for developing highly qualified human resources. This study aims to analyze the role of UIN Raden Fatah in enhancing the quality of education to support the creation of a competitive workforce, particularly within the context of the ASEAN Community. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing literature review, observation, and interviews. The collected data is processed using data reduction techniques to produce accurate conclusions. The transformation of UIN Raden Fatah from IAIN in 2014 marked a pivotal moment in the development of Islamic higher education in Sumatra. UIN Raden Fatah faces significant challenges in achieving World-Class University (WCU) status, particularly in terms of educational quality and budget constraints. This study also provides strategic recommendations for UIN Raden Fatah to strengthen its vision, governance, human resources, infrastructure, and international collaboration, enabling the institution to compete regionally and globally. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the mapping of strategic steps that UIN Raden Fatah Palembang must take to realize its vision of becoming a world-class university.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, rapid advancements in technology and human civilization have significantly accelerated global progress. Amid this wave of change, the development of high-quality human resources (HR) has emerged as a key factor for nations to remain competitive and advance. Countries worldwide are now confronted with increasingly fast-paced and complex global challenges, spanning areas such as economics, technology, and human capital development. To compete on a global scale, each nation is striving to improve the quality of its educational systems, aiming to produce graduates capable of navigating the ever-evolving dynamics of the competitive workforce. In Indonesia, higher education plays a central role in cultivating a skilled and competitive workforce. However, Indonesian universities continue to face numerous challenges, particularly in terms of

educational quality, budget constraints, and limited government support. These issues pose significant obstacles to the nation's efforts to elevate its universities to world-class status and meet international standards.

As higher education becomes increasingly industrialized, Indonesia faces an urgent need to reform its educational system to stay competitive with ASEAN nations like Singapore and Malaysia. University rankings consistently show that the quality of Indonesian higher education trails behind that of its regional counterparts. Significant inequities and disparities in both access to and the quality of higher education continue to pose serious challenges that require immediate attention (Titiek Murniati et al., 2022). Addressing these issues is essential for Indonesia to strengthen its educational sector and secure its place in the competitive landscape of Southeast Asia.

In the global labor market, having a professional, competent, and skilled workforce is essential for competing within the ASEAN job market. In addition to possessing technical expertise, workers must also demonstrate proficiency in foreign languages to compete with their counterparts from neighboring countries effectively. Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Raden Fatah Palembang, as one of the leading higher education institutions in South Sumatra, holds significant potential to contribute to the development of highly skilled human resources. With a student body exceeding 20,000 and faculty members with diverse academic backgrounds, both domestic and international, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang has a strong foundation for continuously improving the quality of its education.

Enhancing the quality of education at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang is vital for fostering a competitive workforce in the ASEAN labor market. This approach aligns with functionalist theory, which views education as one of the most crucial social institutions within societal structures. According to this theory, education serves two primary functions: a manifest function, which directly relates to the development of professional skills and competencies, and a latent function, which indirectly contributes to the improvement of social and economic status. Higher education is perceived as a strategic platform for students to pursue careers that offer financial independence and security.

In facing the challenges and competition within the ASEAN region, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang must strengthen several key areas, including establishing a clear vision and mission, ensuring robust governance structures, improving the quality of human resources, expanding infrastructure, implementing the tri dharma of higher education (teaching, research, and community service), and fostering international collaboration. With comprehensive and targeted quality improvements, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang will be better positioned to meet regional competition and establish itself as a competitive higher education institution within the ASEAN region.

Despite its significant role in South Sumatra's educational landscape, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Raden Fatah Palembang faces considerable challenges in aligning with global and ASEAN regional standards in higher education. While previous research has examined the general quality and governance of Indonesian universities, there remains a notable gap in studies specifically focused on the strategic enhancements required for UIN Raden Fatah Palembang to achieve competitiveness within the ASEAN labor market. This study aims to address this gap by investigating targeted reforms that can improve the university's educational quality, governance, and international collaborations.

The novelty of this research lies in its focused examination of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang as a case study for implementing strategic initiatives within a regional and international framework, drawing on functionalist theory to emphasize the dual roles of education in professional skill development and socio-economic upliftment. By analyzing the impact of these targeted improvements, this research not only contributes to the academic discourse on educational reform in Indonesia but also offers a practical roadmap for other universities facing similar challenges.

The significance of this research extends beyond the institution itself, as the findings have the potential to inform policymakers, educational leaders, and stakeholders on best practices for enhancing the quality and competitiveness of higher education institutions. Through this study, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang can better position itself to contribute to Indonesia's goal of producing a highly-skilled, professional workforce capable of navigating the complexities of the ASEAN job market.

2. METHODS

The study adopts a qualitative research methodology, grounded in a comprehensive literature review relevant to the research focus. Data collection is conducted using two primary techniques: observation and interviews, which are employed in an integrated manner to complement one another. This approach seeks to capture rich, detailed data that can lead to well-founded conclusions. As noted by Sutopo (2002), the data sources for this research encompass a broad spectrum, including key informants, events or activities, locations, objects, images, recordings, and various documents.

The process of observation and interviewing follows the systematic approach outlined by Spradley, beginning with descriptive observations and interviews. The data collection process then progresses through more focused observations and structured interviews, ultimately concluding with selective observation and contrastive interviews. Throughout the research, data reduction is an ongoing process, involving steps such as refining analysis, organizing and categorizing data, and filtering out irrelevant information. These stages facilitate the drawing and verification of robust conclusions.

This methodological framework is designed to yield significant insights into the development of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Raden Fatah Palembang as it strives toward achieving World Class University (WCU) status. The study not only aims to assess existing challenges and institutional processes but also seeks to provide strategic recommendations for enhancing academic quality, research initiatives, and university resource management, all of which align with the institution's long-term vision. In conclusion, the choice of qualitative methodology is justified by its capacity to generate nuanced, in-depth insights into the research problem, thereby enabling the formulation of actionable recommendations for the university's developmental trajectory. (Sutopo, 2002).

The approach to observation and interviews is informed by the guidelines established by Spradley, which commence with descriptive observation and interviews. Data collection is further advanced through focused observation and structural interviews, concluding with selective observation and contrastive interviews. Data reduction occurs continuously throughout the research process. The stages involved include sharpening analysis, grouping data, categorizing information, and filtering relevant details, enabling the derivation and verification of final conclusions. Through this approach, it is anticipated that the research findings will provide significant contributions to the development of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Raden Fatah Palembang in its transformation toward achieving World Class University status. This study aims not only to understand the existing processes and challenges but also to offer relevant strategic recommendations for enhancing academic quality, research initiatives, and university resource management, aligning with the vision of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Strategies for Advancing UIN Raden Fatah Palembang*

In recent decades, the Indonesian government has actively encouraged both public and private higher education institutions to maximize the potential of domestic human resources (HR), with the expectation that Indonesia's workforce can compete at both local and global levels. Given the significance of the concept of a World Class University (WCU), Indonesian institutions of higher education are required to thoroughly comprehend and implement strategies aimed at achieving this status. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and Singapore have engaged foreign educators in the development of their universities, with the intention of expanding academic networks and enhancing the quality of education on an international scale. Therefore, the Indonesian government must fully support higher education institutions in their pursuit of WCU status, especially as an increasing number of universities worldwide aspire to achieve this goal (Hazelkorn, 2011).

An important question arises: what strategies should Indonesian higher education institutions implement to achieve World Class University (WCU) status? International rankings published by institutions such as Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU), Times Higher Education (THE),

Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), and Webometric provide crucial indicators for this endeavor. Three primary factors determining progress toward WCU status include a focus on graduate outcomes, the availability of adequate resources, and effective university governance. All stakeholders in Indonesia must collaborate and work together to enhance these three aspects.

Education, as a system, involves various components, such as the environment, society, and resources, working in unison to achieve national educational goals. This educational system can be analyzed from three key aspects: input, process, and output. The output produced offers feedback to the input and process, enabling evaluation and continuous improvement to comprehensively achieve educational objectives.

An integrated higher education system can create strong synergies in the development of research and interdisciplinary programs. Through this approach, universities can enhance the transfer of knowledge, as well as the effectiveness and efficiency of human resource utilization. The interoperability of institutions and academic programs requires a balance between responsibilities and authorities while maintaining the autonomy of universities as independent entities.

Furthermore, universities are striving to increase funding for research and development programs. To this end, the transfer of research findings and interdisciplinary achievements has become a primary focus. Collaboration among faculties, networking with industry partners, and the establishment of consortia around university regions are strategic steps in this direction. Additionally, developing networks with various social actors, both domestically and internationally, will foster the growth of university research (Hinton, 2022).

However, higher education institutions in Indonesia face several challenges, including rising unemployment rates among graduates, shifting student demographics, a decline in the quality of prospective students, and limited resources to support strategic development. These institutions must adapt to a dynamic environment while ensuring that their educational offerings remain relevant and proactive in the face of future changes. As Porter notes, the development strategies of educational institutions must foster genuine differentiation and innovation; otherwise, such strategies risk becoming mere slogans devoid of substantial impact (Porter, 1996).

3.2 The History of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Raden Fatah Palembang serves as a pioneer in the establishment of several State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Sumatra. However, it is noteworthy that some PTKINs "born" from UIN Raden Fatah have grown and developed more rapidly than their parent institution. This phenomenon presents a significant challenge for UIN Raden Fatah to engage in serious strategic planning and mapping to maintain its leadership role in the advancement of Islamic higher education in the region.

Historically, the founding of IAIN Raden Fatah is closely tied to the presence of Islamic higher education institutions in South Sumatra and was propelled by the influences of IAIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta and IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta. The inception of IAIN was initiated by three prominent scholars: K.H.A. Rasyid Sidik, K.H. Husin Abdul Mu'in, and K.H. Siddik A. This initiative was presented during the Ulama Congress held in Palembang in 1957, receiving broad support from the government and attendees of the congress. On the final day of the congress, September 11, 1957, the Faculty of Islamic Law and Social Sciences was officially established, with K.H. A. Gani Sindang serving as its chair and Muchtar Effendi as its secretary.

The following year, the South Sumatra Islamic Higher Education Foundation was established (Notarial Deed No. 49, July 16, 1958), comprising officials from the government, religious leaders, and community figures. IAIN Raden Fatah Palembang was officially inaugurated on November 13, 1964, at the South Sumatra Provincial Regional Representative Council Building, pursuant to the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 7 of 1964, issued on October 22, 1964.

Following a prolonged struggle involving the entire academic community of UIN and notable figures in South Sumatra, IAIN Raden Fatah underwent a significant transformation. On October 16,

2014, through Presidential Regulation No. 129 of 2014, IAIN Raden Fatah Palembang was officially transformed into UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, marking a new chapter in the development of Islamic higher education in Sumatra. As part of its development strategy, UIN Raden Fatah has opened a second campus in Jakabaring. This transformation from IAIN to UIN represents a crucial opportunity for UIN Raden Fatah Palembang to continue contributing to the advancement and progress of education, both at the national level and specifically in South Sumatra.

3.3 Challenges Facing UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

In recent decades, the rapid advancement of technology and human civilization has necessitated that every nation cultivate a skilled workforce. Without competent human resources, a country will struggle to compete and achieve progress. Consequently, nations worldwide face the dual challenge and opportunity of adapting to increasingly rapid and complex global competition. Higher education institutions play a vital role in producing quality human resources, as their graduates are expected to possess the skills necessary to meet the demands of the global job market.

However, Indonesian higher education institutions, including UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, continue to encounter various obstacles that hinder their attainment of world-class university status. One of the primary challenges is the uneven quality of education coupled with limited funding. This aspect is critical, as achieving World Class University (WCU) status requires adequate resources in terms of finances, infrastructure, and teaching personnel.

Moreover, higher education institutions in Indonesia also face the variances in political and cultural contexts that often impede the enhancement of educational quality. Government policies and regulations significantly influence the journey of these institutions in their efforts to meet international standards. Inconsistent or insufficiently supportive policies can become major barriers to creating an educational environment conducive to university development (Umbase, 2023).

Amid these limitations, institutions like UIN Raden Fatah Palembang are expected to have a clear vision of what it means to be a world-class university and how to achieve that goal. Attaining WCU status requires more than just aspiration; it demands well-developed, measurable strategies supported by effective resource management. Universities must establish clear and auditable performance indicators and ensure efficient financial resource management to implement strategic plans effectively.

Furthermore, universities must recognize that they now operate not only within national boundaries but also in a global context. This reality compels UIN Raden Fatah Palembang to continuously improve the quality of education, enhance collaboration with international partners, and expand its global network. By doing so, the institution can transcend its role as a local educational center and compete on the international stage.

In facing global challenges in education, Indonesian higher education institutions must continually strive for improvement. UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, as a leading higher education institution in South Sumatra, holds significant potential to play a strategic role in producing competent human resources capable of competing internationally. Comprehensive support from the government, an awareness of the importance of quality education, and the implementation of appropriate strategies will be pivotal to UIN Raden Fatah Palembang's success in achieving World Class University status and navigating the increasingly complex global competition.

3.4 Transformation of IAIN into UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

The transformation of IAIN (State Islamic Institute) into UIN (State Islamic University) represents a crucial step for UIN Raden Fatah Palembang in its ongoing commitment to advancing education in Indonesia, particularly in South Sumatra. This process not only elevates the institution's status but also opens up opportunities for developing a broader range of educational programs that are relevant to global needs. In early 2016, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang established a performance agreement with the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, based on logical and rational considerations, as well as the evolving needs and aspirations within the academic community. This

initiative underscores UIN Raden Fatah's commitment to enhancing the quality of education offered and positions the institution as a key player in higher education in Indonesia.

Initially, as IAIN, the institution focused exclusively on Islamic education, offering a limited array of programs concentrated on Islamic studies, such as Shariah, Tarbiyah, Ushuluddin, and Dakwah. However, in response to increasing societal demands and the dynamics of modernity, the transformation into UIN was undertaken to accommodate a wider range of academic disciplines. UIN now encompasses not only religious studies but also general sciences, technology, economics, and social sciences. This broadening of academic offerings equips graduates of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang with comprehensive skills that are pertinent to global requirements. A significant change following the transformation is the introduction of study programs beyond religious fields. New faculties have been established to include social sciences, economics, technology, and natural sciences, aiming to enhance the competitiveness of UIN graduates in an increasingly competitive job market, both nationally and within the ASEAN region. With this diverse range of academic programs, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang can provide a more holistic education.

As part of the transformation process, enhancing the quality of human resources—both faculty and administrative staff—has become a primary focus. UIN Raden Fatah Palembang encourages faculty members to pursue further education at advanced levels, both domestically and internationally. This initiative is anticipated to improve the quality of teaching and research at UIN, as well as strengthen the institution's capacity to generate research that addresses societal needs.

The transformation also encompasses the development of campus infrastructure. UIN Raden Fatah Palembang is actively working to enhance educational facilities, including laboratories, libraries, and modern classrooms. Adequate infrastructure is vital for supporting the teaching and learning process as well as research efforts, thereby enabling the institution to meet world-class university standards.

As part of its vision to become a world-class university, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang is strengthening collaborative networks with international universities. This is being accomplished through student and faculty exchange programs and collaborative research initiatives. Through these international partnerships, UIN Raden Fatah Palembang aims to bolster its global reputation and enhance its academic quality.

Within the framework of the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (Three Pillars of Higher Education), UIN Raden Fatah Palembang is not solely focused on teaching but also emphasizes research and community service. The institution strives to produce research that benefits society and contributes substantively to the advancement of knowledge and technology. Engagement in community service serves as an indicator of UIN's success in addressing social and economic challenges in an era of globalization.

This transformation process aligns with UIN Raden Fatah Palembang's vision of becoming a World Class University. The steps toward this vision encompass enhancing the quality of education, research, and institutional governance. UIN Raden Fatah Palembang also seeks to improve its standing in international university rankings by continuously elevating academic quality and expanding its global network.

In summary, the transformation from IAIN to UIN Raden Fatah Palembang constitutes a comprehensive effort to reinforce the role of Islamic higher education institutions within a global context. This process necessitates a commitment from various stakeholders, including the academic community, government, and society, to realize UIN's vision as a world-class university capable of producing high-quality graduates who are globally competitive.

3.5 Development Strategies for UIN Raden Fatah Palembang

UIN Raden Fatah Palembang has articulated four primary development strategies:

1. Establishing a Representative Campus: The university aims to create a campus environment that is representative and conducive to academic activities, equipped with high-quality

facilities and infrastructure that align with the needs of the Tri Dharma activities (education, research, and community service).

2. **Enhancing Higher Education Development Models:** The institution seeks to develop effective and efficient higher education development frameworks, supported by an integrated information system that streamlines operations and enhances educational delivery.
3. **Research-Based Educational and Community Engagement Activities:** UIN Raden Fatah emphasizes the importance of research-driven teaching and community service initiatives, fostering a symbiotic relationship between academic inquiry and societal contribution.
4. **Strategic Partnership Development:** The university is committed to cultivating strategic collaborative networks that will enhance the quality of Tri Dharma activities and improve the competitiveness of its graduates (Statute 2015, Article 6).

Under the tagline “Knowledge, Quality, and Integrity,” UIN Raden Fatah Palembang is committed to fostering an academic environment characterized by INSANI (Beautiful, Harmonious, Safe, Comfortable, and Islamic) principles for all stakeholders. The university aspires to create an engaging, secure, and morally sound atmosphere that supports its academic community in exploring, developing, and disseminating knowledge.

The management and development of UIN Raden Fatah Palembang are centered on several critical aspects, including institutional structure, human resources, facilities and infrastructure, financial management, academic services, accreditation, administration, collaborative networks, and academic achievements and reputation. The educational offerings at UIN Raden Fatah are delivered through a Semester Credit System, encompassing a range of activities such as lectures, seminars, discussions, symposia, workshops, and practical training. For undergraduate and diploma programs, arrangements are made according to the applicable Rector’s Decrees.

As of September 2023, UIN Raden Fatah has established nine faculties and a graduate program, comprising 39 majors/programs across Diploma 3 (D-3), Bachelor’s (S-1), Master’s (S-2), and Doctoral (S-3) levels. In its first five years, amid various nomenclature changes, UIN Raden Fatah must not only reorganize its institutional framework but also engage in institutional development at the national level to support long-term higher education strategies.

Several strategies have been formulated, as outlined in the mission of the UIN Raden Fatah Institute for Research and Community Service, which emphasizes rural industrialization through the development of appropriate science and technology. Collaboration with service users is heavily emphasized, as it enables the university to be more accommodating to societal needs. On the international front, as it navigates the ASEAN Economic Community, the aspiration to emerge as a university with competitive research outputs and alumni within ASEAN is crucial, achieved through enhanced faculty and student engagement in research and community service (Fadhli, 2020).

Research agendas generated from retrospective analyses are often limited to past issues and inadequately focus on future directions. In contrast, research that adopts a proactive approach can facilitate discussions among experts regarding the future trajectory of UIN Raden Fatah, thereby shaping research directions, practices, and related policies. Increasing research funding is essential for enhancing the quality of research within higher education institutions.

The principles of the Tri Dharma of higher education should not merely delineate the three elements of education, research, and community service. Instead, these components must be designed as an integrated whole that mutually reinforces each other, forming a cyclical process that yields both inputs and outputs. Ideally, course materials should be updated derived from research findings or scholarly work (research-based learning), applied through community service experiences. Faculty members should not only convey content from existing textbooks but also share insights based on their research outcomes and practical experiences.

Furthermore, the quality of graduates should not be assessed solely through conventional academic performance indicators such as GPA or Cum Laude distinctions. This perspective aligns with

the Ministerial Regulation of Research, Technology, and Higher Education No. 44 of 2015, which mandates that learning processes associated with student research must adhere to National Research Standards, while community service activities undertaken by students must conform to National Standards for Community Service.

The necessity for integrating Tri Dharma activities is increasingly urgent, especially in the current higher education context, which often emphasizes the delivery of separate content and fails to effectively integrate hard and soft skills. In an increasingly complex job market, the synergy between these two aspects is essential. Additionally, the rapid advancement of science and technology results in an ever-growing array of materials to be taught, not all of which are relevant to future graduate needs. Passive and unidirectional learning processes, such as lectures, further exacerbate this situation.

To enhance social relevance and academic rigor, curricula must be regularly evaluated and updated in collaboration with stakeholders to align with current and emerging scientific and technological developments. The curriculum serves as a foundational reference for shaping and ensuring the achievement of competencies in each program. It should be assessed based on its relevance to objectives, scope, depth of material, and organization that promotes the development of both hard and soft skills applicable across various contexts (Mcdermott, 2011).

Once the curriculum has been formulated, the next step is its implementation in participatory learning activities involving both faculty and students. Evaluation of learning outcomes should encompass all domains of learning and be conducted objectively, transparently, and accountably, utilizing valid and reliable assessment instruments, as well as benchmark assessments. This evaluation aims to measure students' academic achievements and provide feedback regarding the effectiveness of the learning process.

A curriculum in higher education based on learning outcomes emphasizes achieving educational results that meet stakeholder expectations, balancing hard and soft skills. This domain encompasses four aspects: knowledge, general skills, specific skills, and attitudes. This approach aligns with current labor market demands, which increasingly stress the importance of holistic individual capabilities and collaborative competencies.

4. CONCLUSION

The transformation of IAIN into UIN Raden Fatah Palembang marks a strategic effort to strengthen the role of Islamic higher education in addressing the demands of globalization and international competition within the academic field. This transformation, beyond merely a change in institutional name, involves extensive restructuring across various dimensions, including human resource development, infrastructural expansion, and the adoption of an integrated development strategy. Key initiatives, such as constructing a modern campus, developing a unified information system, fostering research activities, and forming strategic collaborations, collectively aim to support the *tridharma* of higher education: teaching, research, and community service.

Research findings indicate that these initiatives are integral to the university's progress toward becoming a competitive institution, emphasizing an educational model that merges education, research, and community engagement to produce globally competent graduates. The implications of this study highlight the need for a curriculum aligned with technological advancements and labor market demands, ensuring students develop both technical and interpersonal skills. However, this research is limited by its focus on institutional changes without an in-depth analysis of student and faculty perceptions, which may impact the success of these transformations. Future research should consider these perspectives and investigate long-term outcomes of the transformation on student employability and institutional reputation, offering further insights into the effectiveness of such reforms in Islamic higher education institutions.

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