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Negotiating Global Pedagogical Standards and Islamic Educational Values: A Qualitative Study of Teaching Practices in Indonesian Islamic Universities

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Abstract. This study investigated how lecturers in an Islamic Education Department negotiate global pedagogical standards within an Islamic epistemological framework. Amid increasing pressures of accreditation, outcome-based education, and international quality assurance systems, Islamic higher education institutions are required to align with global benchmarks while maintaining their religious and moral foundations. Using a qualitative design, this study drew in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 lecturers. Data were analyzed thematically to explore how participants interpret, adapt, and respond to global pedagogical expectations in their teaching practices. The findings revealed three central patterns. First, global standards significantly shape curriculum design and assessment practices, particularly through measurable learning outcomes and documentation requirements. Second, Islamic epistemology functions as a normative anchor, guiding lecturers to integrate ethical responsibility, character formation, consultation (*shura*), and intellectual reasoning (*ijtihad*) into globally structured formats. Rather than perceiving global approaches such as critical thinking and student-centered learning as external impositions, participants reinterpret them through Islamic intellectual traditions. Third, negotiation emerges as the dominant strategy; lecturers pragmatically comply with institutional standards while critically reflecting on the limitations of purely quantitative evaluation systems, especially in assessing moral development. The study concludes that globalization in Islamic higher education operates as a process of negotiated equilibrium. Educational quality is conceptualized not merely in terms of measurable academic achievement but as the balanced integration of knowledge, integrity, and social responsibility. These findings contribute to broader discussions on internationalization, educational quality, and epistemological pluralism in faith-based higher education contexts.

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1. Introduction

The rapid globalization of higher education has significantly reshaped how universities conceptualize teaching quality, academic excellence, and institutional success (Shahjahan & Grimm, 2023; Tight, 2022). Higher education systems are increasingly influenced by transnational policy agendas, international rankings, accreditation mechanisms, and outcome-based evaluation frameworks (Woldegiorgis, 2024; Zhou & Alam, 2024). Within this context, pedagogical effectiveness is often defined through standardized indicators such as student-centered learning (SCL), measurable learning outcomes, and technology-enhanced instruction (Bougherira et al., 2024; Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024). While these developments have contributed to improved accountability and innovation, they also promote relatively uniform conceptions of educational quality that may overlook diverse epistemological traditions and moral purposes of education (Bamberger & Morris, 2024; Mendes, 2023).

These dynamics pose particular challenges for faith-based institutions such as Islamic universities whose educational missions are grounded in distinct philosophical and theological frameworks (Daun & Arjmand, 2021; Lahmar, 2023). In Islamic educational thought, knowledge (*'ilm*) is intrinsically linked to ethical refinement, spiritual awareness, and social responsibility (Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019). Foundational concepts such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *akhlaq* emphasize education as a holistic process that integrates intellectual development with moral and spiritual formation. This perspective differs from performance-oriented models that prioritize quantifiable outcomes (Koopman & Koopman, 2023; Macfarlane, 2024). As a result, engagement with global pedagogical standards in Islamic higher education involves not only technical alignment but also epistemological negotiation regarding the purposes and meanings of education (Saada, 2023).

The Indonesian context provides a relevant setting for examining this intersection. As the world's largest Muslim-majority country, Indonesia has a well-established system of State Islamic Higher Education institutions that have undergone significant transformation in response to globalization and national reform agendas (Azra, 2023; Sukirman, 2022). These institutions have evolved into comprehensive universities integrating Islamic and modern disciplines while remaining accountable to national standards, international accreditation pressures, and global competitiveness (Rakhmani & Sakhyya, 2024; Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023).

Within this environment, lecturers operate at the intersection of global pedagogical expectations and Islamic intellectual traditions. They are required to adopt innovative teaching practices that align with international quality frameworks while simultaneously preserving and enacting Islamic ethical and epistemological principles (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024; Mukhibat et al., 2024). This dual responsibility creates a space of pedagogical negotiation in which teaching

practices are shaped through processes of adaptation, reinterpretation, and synthesis rather than simple adoption or resistance. Understanding how lecturers navigate this intersection is essential for capturing the complexity of teaching in Islamic higher education and for contributing to broader debates on globalization, educational quality, and epistemological diversity.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to teaching effectiveness and instructional innovation in higher education, much of the existing research remains dominated by quantitative designs that examine correlations between teaching competence and student academic performance (Kwiek & Roszka, 2024). While such studies contribute valuable empirical insights, they often conceptualize pedagogy in technical or managerial terms, focusing primarily on measurable outcomes (Macfarlane, 2024). Less attention has been given to the lived experiences of lecturers who must reconcile external performance standards with internally held ethical and religious commitments.

Furthermore, global higher education literature frequently assumes the universality and neutrality of Western-derived pedagogical standards, overlooking how these standards may be reinterpreted, localized, or contested in non-Western and faith-based settings (Tight, 2022; Zhao & Liu, 2024). In the context of Islamic higher education, there remains a notable gap in qualitative research that explores how educators understand and enact their pedagogical roles amid the intersection of global reform agendas and Islamic epistemological principles (Daun & Arjmand, 2021). Without such inquiry, the complexity of teaching in Islamic universities risks being reduced to simplified metrics detached from its moral and spiritual dimensions.

Addressing this gap is both theoretically and practically significant. Theoretically, this study makes an explicit contribution to debates on globalization and faith-based higher education by conceptualizing the relationship between global pedagogical standards and Islamic epistemology as a process of negotiated epistemic alignment. Rather than treating global standards (e.g., outcome-based education [OBE], SCL, and measurable quality indicators) as neutral and universally applicable, this study positions them as historically situated knowledge frameworks that carry implicit assumptions about the purposes of education. In contrast, Islamic epistemology frames education as an integrative process that unites intellectual development with moral, spiritual, and social formation.

By bringing these two paradigms into dialogue, the study demonstrates that pedagogical practice in Islamic higher education is shaped through processes of reinterpretation, translation, and selective adaptation rather than simple adoption or resistance. In doing so, the current study advances comparative and international education scholarship by challenging homogenizing narratives of global pedagogical reform (Shahjahan & Grimm, 2023) and by proposing a more nuanced conceptualization of educational globalization as epistemologically plural and locally mediated (Roberts & Lamp, 2022). It further contributes to scholarship on faith-based higher education by theorizing lecturers as epistemic

mediators who actively reframe global pedagogical concepts through Islamic intellectual traditions, thereby expanding prevailing understandings of how educational quality and excellence are defined across diverse knowledge systems. This perspective moves beyond binary frameworks of Westernization versus localization and instead, foregrounds the co-construction of meaning at the intersection of global policy and religious epistemology. Practically, the study holds implications for institutional leadership, curriculum design, and professional development within Islamic universities (Lahmar, 2023). By illuminating how lecturers negotiate competing expectations, the findings may inform more culturally responsive quality assurance policies that respect Islamic educational values while engaging constructively with global benchmarks (Bamberger & Morris, 2024). In doing so, the study supports Islamic higher education institutions in articulating distinctive yet globally relevant models of teaching effectiveness.

Guided by these considerations, this qualitative research sought to explore how lecturers in Indonesian Islamic universities negotiate the intersection of global pedagogical standards and Islamic educational values in their everyday teaching practices. Specifically, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do lecturers in Indonesian Islamic universities interpret and make sense of global pedagogical standards and quality expectations in higher education?
2. In what ways are Islamic educational values such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, and *akhlaq* integrated into their instructional practices and classroom interactions?
3. What tensions, challenges, or complementarities emerge as lecturers attempt to reconcile global pedagogical frameworks with Islamic epistemological commitments?
4. How do these negotiated teaching practices shape the understandings of academic achievement and educational quality within Islamic higher education contexts?

2. Research Methods

This study adopted a qualitative single-case study design to generate an in-depth and contextually grounded understanding of how lecturers in an Indonesian public Islamic university negotiate global pedagogical standards and Islamic educational values in their teaching practices. A qualitative approach was methodologically appropriate because the research questions were exploratory and interpretive in nature, seeking to examine meanings, negotiations, and lived pedagogical experiences rather than to test predetermined hypotheses or quantify relationships among variables (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024; Rodriguez et al., 2024; Stolz, 2023).

The selection of a single institutional case was intentional and theoretically grounded. The chosen university represents a critical case within Indonesian Islamic higher education, as it has actively implemented curriculum reforms aligned with national accreditation frameworks and international quality assurance standards (Bougherira et al., 2023). This makes it a particularly suitable site for examining the intersection between global pedagogical expectations and Islamic epistemological commitments. Rather than aiming for statistical

generalization, the study seeks analytical generalization (Tight, 2022) where insights from a contextually rich case contribute to broader theoretical understandings of globalization and faith-based higher education. For ethical and confidentiality reasons, the institution remains unnamed.

Participants were selected through purposive and maximum variation sampling to ensure information-rich cases aligned with the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). Recruitment was conducted through formal institutional communication and professional networks whereby potential participants were invited based on their teaching experience and involvement in pedagogical or curriculum-related activities. The final sample consisted of 10 lecturers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, including Islamic studies, education, social sciences, and natural sciences. Inclusion criteria required a minimum of three years of teaching experience and active engagement in undergraduate instruction.

Maximum variation was achieved by deliberately including participants with different academic disciplines, teaching experiences, and levels of engagement with curriculum reform initiatives such as OBE, SCL, and digital pedagogy (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024; Woldegiorgis, 2024). This strategy enabled the study to capture a wide range of perspectives while maintaining depth of analysis. Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, which was indicated by the recurrence of patterns and the absence of substantially new conceptual insights (Stolz, 2023).

Data was generated through semi-structured in-depth interviews as the sole data collection method. Interviews constituted the primary and exclusive source of data, each lasting approximately 45-90 minutes and conducted in the language preferred by the participant. The interview protocol was theoretically informed by literature on educational globalization (Shahjahan & Grimm, 2023; Tight, 2022) and Islamic educational philosophy (Daun & Arjmand, 2021; Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019) while remaining sufficiently open to capture emergent perspectives.

Questions explored lecturers' interpretations of global pedagogical standards such as SCL, OBE, digital integration, and accreditation requirements (Bougherira et al., 2024; Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024); their understanding and enactment of Islamic pedagogical concepts including *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, *akhlaq*, and *adab* (Saada, 2023); perceived tensions or complementarities between these frameworks; and their conceptions of academic achievement and educational quality. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic nuance.

Data analysis followed a reflexive thematic analysis framework, drawing on constructivist qualitative traditions (Charmaz, 2006; Nawas et al., 2025; Sukirman & Kabilan, 2023). The analytical process began with repeated readings of the transcripts to achieve immersion and familiarity. Initial coding combined inductive coding grounded in the participants' language and meanings, with deductive coding informed by the research questions and theoretical constructs

related to globalization and Islamic epistemology. Codes were iteratively refined and clustered into candidate themes that captured patterned responses across participants such as internalization of global standards, reinterpretation through Islamic epistemology, pragmatic adaptation strategies, and redefinition of academic excellence. Themes were continually reviewed against the dataset to ensure coherence, distinctiveness, and conceptual rigor, consistent with phenomenological and interpretive research standards (Stolz, 2023). The analysis sought not only to describe practices but also to interpret the underlying value orientations and epistemological assumptions shaping pedagogical decisions. Throughout the analytical process, constant comparison was employed to identify similarities and divergences across disciplinary contexts, thereby enhancing the robustness of interpretation (Charmaz, 2006).

To ensure trustworthiness in accordance with qualitative research standards recognized in internationally indexed journals, several strategies were implemented. Credibility was strengthened through member checking whereby selected participants reviewed summaries of preliminary interpretations to confirm accuracy (Rodriguez et al., 2024). Dependability was supported through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting coding decisions, analytical memos, and theme development. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexive journaling in which the researcher critically examined positionality, assumptions, and potential biases, particularly given the normative dimensions of Islamic education (Stolz, 2023). Transferability was addressed through thick description of the institutional and pedagogical context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings (Tight, 2022).

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional authority prior to data collection. Participants were provided with detailed informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and the right to withdraw without consequence. Pseudonyms were assigned to both the institution and individual participants, and identifying details were removed during transcription. All digital data were securely stored on password-protected devices. Given the potential sensitivity of discussing institutional standards and religious commitments, particularly within contemporary debates on globalization and Islamic identity (Lahmar, 2023; Van Bruinessen, 2015), particular care was taken to create a respectful interview environment that encouraged open reflection without fear of professional repercussions.

Overall, the methodological design ensured alignment with the research questions by generating rich, multi-layered data on how lecturers interpreted global pedagogical standards, enacted Islamic educational values, negotiated tensions between these frameworks, and conceptualized academic achievement within an Islamic higher education context. Through rigorous qualitative procedures and theoretical integration, the study aimed to produce analytically robust and internationally relevant findings that contribute to scholarly debates on educational globalization and faith-based higher education (Daun & Arjmand, 2021; Shahjahan & Grimm, 2023).

3. Findings

The overall findings illustrate how lecturers in Indonesian Islamic universities navigate the intersection of global pedagogical standards and Islamic educational values through a process of active negotiation (see Figure 1). Rather than passively adopting international frameworks or rejecting them outright, lecturers position themselves as mediators who interpret, adapt, and reinterpret global expectations within an اسلامی epistemological framework. Their practices reflect a dynamic balance between administrative compliance, pedagogical innovation, and ethical commitment. This process of negotiation not only shapes how teaching is enacted in the classroom but also redefines broader conceptions of academic achievement and educational quality as an integration of intellectual competence, moral character, and social responsibility.

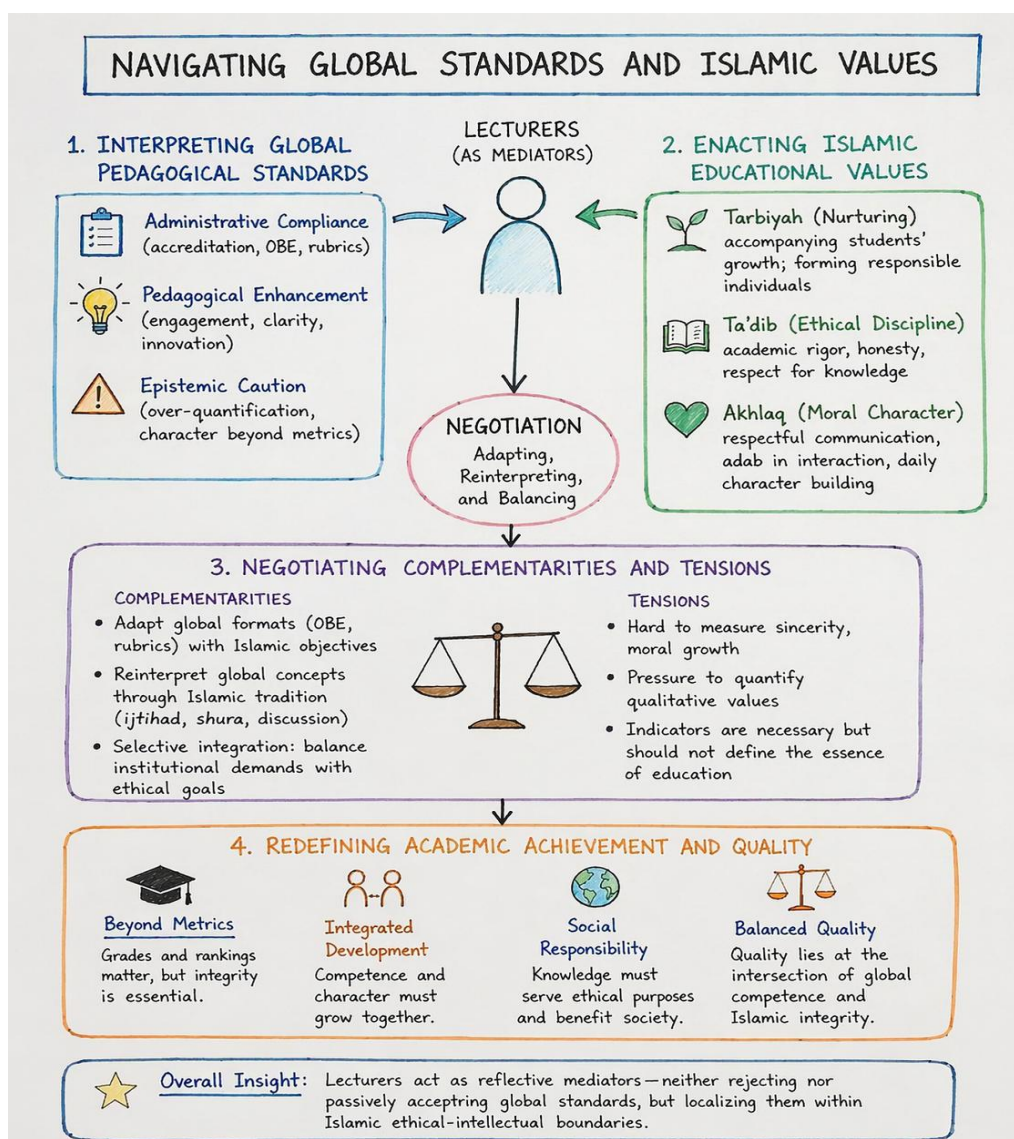


Figure 1: Model of negotiating global pedagogical standards and Islamic educational values in higher education

3.1 Interpreting Global Pedagogical Standards - Between Administrative Compliance and Reflective Engagement

All participants demonstrated familiarity with dominant global pedagogical discourses, including SCL, OBE, accreditation frameworks, measurable learning outcomes, and digital transformation. However, their interpretations ranged from procedural compliance to reflective appropriation and critical reservation. Several participants framed global standards primarily as institutional obligations. P1 stated,

"We must align our semester plans with outcome-based education because accreditation requires measurable outcomes. Sometimes the focus becomes administrative."

P7 reinforced this procedural orientation:

"The structure of assessment rubrics follows international templates. We adjust to what is required."

These accounts indicate that global frameworks function as governance technologies shaping documentation, reporting, and accountability mechanisms. However, other participants described these standards as pedagogical opportunities. P3 and P6 reflected, respectively:

"Student-centered learning encourages active participation. This improves engagement, and it is not contradictory to our values."

"Digital integration expands students' access to knowledge. The key is how we guide them ethically."

Similarly, P9 emphasized the developmental benefit:

"Outcome-based education clarifies expectations. Students understand what competencies they must achieve."

For these lecturers, global pedagogical models are not merely regulatory impositions but instruments that can enhance clarity, structure, and innovation. Nevertheless, epistemic reservation was evident. P2 articulated a philosophical concern:

"Education is not only about measurable outcomes. Some aspects of character development cannot be quantified."

P10 summarized the tension succinctly:

"We follow international standards, but we must remember that our educational philosophy is broader than metrics."

In response to the first research question, lecturers interpreted global pedagogical standards across three interrelated positions: (1) administrative compliance, (2) pedagogical enhancement, and (3) epistemic caution regarding over-quantification. Their engagement reflects critical awareness rather than passive adoption.

3.2 Enacting Islamic Educational Values as Pedagogical Orientation

Across interviews, Islamic educational values were described not as supplementary religious content but as foundational orientations guiding teaching philosophy, relational engagement, and academic expectations. The concept of *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing) emerged strongly.

P5 explained,

“Teaching means accompanying students in their growth. Tarbiyah is gradual. We guide them intellectually and morally.”

P8 connected *tarbiyah* to responsibility:

“We are accountable not only for delivering content but for shaping responsible individuals.”

The concept of *ta’dib* (ethical discipline) was linked to academic rigor. P1 noted,

“When students learn to cite correctly and avoid plagiarism, this is part of moral education.”

P9 reinforced this:

“Intellectual discipline is part of adab. Students must respect knowledge and sources.”

Akhlaq (moral character) was reflected in communication norms. P3 stated,

“In classroom discussions, disagreement is allowed, but adab must be maintained.”

P4 explained,

“Respectful dialogue is part of our identity as educators. Students learn from how we speak, not only what we teach.”

P10 added,

“Character is shaped through daily interaction, not through lectures about morality.”

In response to the second research question, Islamic educational values were enacted relationally (*tarbiyah*), intellectually (*ta’dib*), and communicatively (*akhlaq*). These values permeate teaching philosophy, assessment ethics, and interactional conduct, functioning as embedded pedagogical principles rather than discrete curricular modules.

3.3 Negotiating Complementarities and Tensions

The interview data indicate that participants did not frame globalization as an existential or ideological threat to Islamic education. The first pattern involved pragmatic adaptation. Participants described maintaining global pedagogical formats such as OBE, structured rubrics, and standardized assessment templates while redefining the substantive meaning of those frameworks through Islamic objectives. P7 explained,

“We follow the outcome-based format, but our learning outcomes include ethical responsibility. So, students are assessed not only on knowledge but also on accountability in how they use that knowledge.”

This statement reflects strategic alignment rather than resistance. The lecturer does not reject OBE; instead, the global structure becomes a container into which ethical dimensions are inserted. The format remains internationally legible, but its internal logic is morally expanded. Similarly, P4 emphasized structural compliance combined with content reorientation:

"The structure may be global, but the content reflects our moral framework. For example, in group projects, we include responsibility and fairness as part of the evaluation."

Here, global pedagogical tools are domesticated. Rather than perceiving accreditation standards as culturally intrusive, participants operationalize them in ways that preserve Islamic commitments. Adaptation thus becomes a method of localization, global in form, Islamic in purpose. P9 further clarified this selective integration:

"We cannot ignore international standards, especially for institutional credibility. But we define success in ways that include ethical behavior and sincerity."

Beyond adaptation at the structural level, participants engaged in deeper epistemological reinterpretation. Rather than treating global pedagogical concepts as foreign imports, they rearticulated them using Islamic intellectual vocabulary. P1 addressed the discourse surrounding critical thinking:

"Critical thinking is often presented as Western, but our tradition has ijihad. Analytical reasoning and independent judgment are already part of our scholarship."

By invoking *ijihad*, P1 reframes critical thinking as historically embedded within Islamic jurisprudential and intellectual traditions. This move reduces epistemic asymmetry by asserting conceptual continuity rather than dependency. P3 connected SCL to *shura* (consultative decision-making):

"Student participation reflects shura. When we invite students to express their ideas, we are practicing consultation, which is deeply rooted in our tradition."

This reinterpretation accomplishes two functions. First, it legitimizes participatory pedagogy within Islamic epistemology. Second, it counters the implicit narrative that innovation flows unidirectionally from Western educational theory. P6 reinforced this pattern of conceptual translation:

"Active learning can be explained through our own intellectual heritage. Discussion, questioning, and reflection are not new to us."

Through these reinterpretations, global terminology is recontextualized rather than merely adopted. The process is not superficial equivalence; it is epistemic reframing. By locating SCL, critical thinking, and active learning within Islamic concepts, lecturers reduce cultural dissonance and affirm intellectual agency. P10 summarizes this bridging strategy:

"We do not reject global ideas, but we reinterpret them in ways that align with our worldview."

Despite these integrative strategies, participants acknowledged unresolved tensions, particularly regarding performance measurement and accreditation regimes. These tensions were not framed as ideological conflicts but as structural constraints within contemporary higher education governance. P5 expressed concern:

"How do we measure sincerity? Accreditation focuses on indicators, but moral transformation is invisible."

This statement highlights a fundamental epistemological divergence: managerial educational systems prioritize measurable outputs, whereas Islamic educational philosophy includes interior dispositions such as intention (*niyyah*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*), which resist quantification. P2 articulated a similar discomfort:

"Sometimes we feel pressured to quantify everything, even aspects that are qualitative. It becomes difficult to express moral development in numerical terms."

This remark illustrates dual consciousness; lecturers operate within accreditation systems while maintaining awareness of their epistemic limits. Compliance does not equate to full philosophical endorsement. P6 elaborated on this internal negotiation:

"Indicators are necessary for institutional quality, but they should not define the essence of education."

In response to the third research question, the findings demonstrate that complementarities are actively constructed rather than assumed, and tensions are managed through strategic adaptation and epistemic reframing. Lecturers position themselves as mediators who localize global pedagogical discourse within Islamic ethical-intellectual boundaries while navigating structural pressures inherent in contemporary higher education systems.

3.4 Redefining Academic Achievement and Educational Quality

Analysis of the interview data indicates a substantive reconceptualization of academic achievement among the participants. Rather than equating quality with grade point average (GPA), employability rates, publication output, or global rankings, lecturers articulated a multidimensional framework in which intellectual competence, moral integrity, and social responsibility are inseparable components of educational success. This expanded conception reflects a normative reorientation of quality from purely performative metrics toward ethical-intellectual integration. Participants consistently acknowledged the importance of measurable academic indicators; however, they simultaneously positioned such metrics as insufficient. P9 articulated this tension clearly:

"High academic scores are important, but without integrity, education is incomplete."

This statement reveals a hierarchical ordering of values; cognitive performance is necessary but not definitive. In this view, academic excellence cannot be reduced to grades because grades measure only technical mastery, not ethical orientation. Similarly, P2 emphasized developmental integration:

“Competence and character must grow together. If one develops without the other, the education process is unbalanced.”

The emphasis on simultaneity (“must grow together”) suggests that moral formation is not an optional complement but a co-equal dimension of achievement. Academic quality, therefore, is conceptualized as integrative rather than additive; character is not appended to competence but embedded within it. P3 reinforced this position by redefining institutional vision:

“Quality means intellectual strength grounded in ethical commitment.”

Beyond individual character, participants extended the definition of achievement to societal contribution. P10 highlighted this outward orientation:

“Graduates should contribute positively to society. Knowledge must serve ethical purposes.”

This statement reframes achievement as relational and civic. The measure of quality lies not solely in personal advancement but in ethical application of knowledge within broader social contexts. P6 elaborated on this responsibility:

“If we focus only on international standards, we risk losing moral direction. If we ignore standards, we lose competitiveness. Balance is essential.”

Here, educational quality is framed as equilibrium between global competitiveness and moral accountability. Participants did not dismiss international benchmarks; rather, they resisted allowing those benchmarks to monopolize definitions of success. Quality is thus positioned at the intersection of global relevance and ethical integrity. P1 similarly articulated the notion of balance:

“We aim for global competence and Islamic integrity at the same time.”

In response to the fourth research question, the findings demonstrate that academic achievement is redefined as a balanced synthesis of intellectual competence, ethical character, and social responsibility. International standards and measurable indicators are acknowledged as structurally necessary for institutional legitimacy; however, they are normatively subordinated to a broader moral-intellectual framework.

4. Discussion

This study provides a critical examination of how lecturers in an Indonesian Islamic higher education context negotiate the pressures of global pedagogical standardization while sustaining Islamic epistemological commitments. Rather than depicting globalization as either an emancipatory force or a hegemonic imposition, the findings reveal a patterned process of mediation, reinterpretation, and selective adaptation. By engaging contemporary debates on internationalization, neoliberal governance, religious education, and epistemic decolonization, this discussion argues that lecturers function as intellectual mediators who localize global standards within Islamic ethical-intellectual boundaries. Their practices illuminate the dialectical relationship between structural constraint and pedagogical agency in contemporary higher education.

Participants' narratives regarding accreditation systems, OBE, and measurable performance indicators strongly resonate with analyses of internationalization as a governance mechanism rather than a purely academic exchange project. Contemporary scholarship suggests that internationalization increasingly operates through quality assurance frameworks, benchmarking systems, and competitive visibility metrics (Tight, 2022). In this sense, global pedagogical standards function as regulatory technologies that structure curriculum design, assessment, and documentation practices. The lecturers' reflections that "we follow the outcome-based format" but embed ethical responsibility within those outcomes illustrate how compliance is often procedural, while meaning-making remains locally situated.

The findings further align with political economy critiques of neoliberal higher education. Woldegiorgis (2024) argues that universities are increasingly embedded within global competitiveness regimes that privilege visibility, rankings, and measurable outputs. Participants' concerns about quantification, particularly regarding moral and spiritual dimensions, demonstrate awareness of these managerial logics. Their hesitation about reducing sincerity or *akhlaq* to indicators reflects a broader critique of audit culture in higher education. Rather than rejecting accreditation outright, lecturers describe a cautious acceptance, suggesting that global standards are strategically adopted to maintain institutional legitimacy within national and transnational systems.

Importantly, these experiences echo findings from comparative studies indicating that academics often perceive accreditation simultaneously as quality enhancement and bureaucratic intensification (Bougherira et al., 2024). The Indonesian Islamic university context does not exist outside global managerial trends; instead, it is deeply enmeshed in them. However, the lecturers' interpretive strategies complicate deterministic accounts of neoliberal homogenization. They reveal that regulatory frameworks shape structures but do not fully determine epistemological content.

While global pedagogical language frames institutional structures, Islamic epistemology emerges as the deeper normative anchor guiding lecturers' interpretations. The reinterpretation of critical thinking through *ijtihad* and student participation through *shura* exemplifies epistemological translation rather than assimilation. This translation disrupts binaries that equate critical pedagogy exclusively with Western intellectual traditions. By locating analytical reasoning within Islamic jurisprudential heritage, participants assert conceptual continuity between Islamic intellectual history and contemporary educational discourse.

Such positioning aligns with reformist trajectories in Indonesian Islamic higher education, particularly the integration of religious and general sciences within the State Islamic University (UIN) model articulated by Azra (2023). Azra (2023) emphasizes moderation (*wasatiyyah*) and intellectual openness as foundational principles of contemporary Islamic higher education. The present findings demonstrate how this ethos is enacted pedagogically; moderation is not merely ideological rhetoric but an operational strategy of balance between global

competence and Islamic integrity. Moreover, the lecturers' insistence that moral formation is inseparable from intellectual achievement reflects longstanding debates in Islamic educational philosophy (Daun & Arjmand, 2021; Tolchah & Mu'ammam, 2019). Their narratives suggest that globalization does not erase religious epistemology; rather, it intensifies the need to articulate it explicitly within institutional documents and learning outcomes. This articulation is not defensive but constructive; it reframes international pedagogical categories within Islamic ethical grammar.

The identified theme of adaptation, reinterpretation, and selective critique can be theorized as negotiated internationalization. Instead of rejecting global discourse or internalizing it uncritically, the lecturers mediate its meaning through Islamic conceptual resources. This aligns with decolonial scholarship that views epistemic agency as the capacity to re-center marginalized knowledge traditions within dominant frameworks (Mendes, 2023). Importantly, this mediation does not eliminate asymmetry. The need to 'translate' Islamic values into globally recognizable terminology underscores the persistence of hierarchical knowledge systems. As Bamberger and Morris (2024) argue, internationalization may reproduce postcolonial inequalities when standards are defined primarily within Western epistemic traditions.

The participants' strategies, therefore, represent pragmatic resilience rather than structural transformation. They work within dominant architectures while subtly reorienting their moral direction. Comparatively, similar tensions have been observed in non-Western contexts where internationalization risks being conflated with Westernization (Zhao & Liu, 2024). The lecturers in this study actively resist conflation and assert that critical inquiry, consultation, and intellectual rigor (Sukirman, 2025) are not imports but indigenous Islamic principles. This assertion demonstrates epistemological confidence and challenges narratives that portray Islamic education as inherently traditionalist or resistant to modern pedagogical reform.

The findings significantly extend contemporary debates about the meaning of educational quality. The participants consistently articulated academic achievement as an integration of cognitive mastery, ethical formation, and societal contribution. This expanded conception contrasts with metric-driven definitions centered on GPA, employability rates, or global rankings. Their discourse reflects an alternative normative framework in which integrity, responsibility, and moral accountability are co-equal with technical competence. Such reconceptualization resonates with arguments that universities must safeguard their academic core amid performance-based governance regimes (Young et al., 2024). The participants' emphasis on 'balance' mirrors this call for equilibrium between accountability and intellectual mission.

However, in the Islamic higher education context, that equilibrium is not framed solely as institutional survival but as theological and ethical necessity. Furthermore, the moral-intellectual synthesis articulated by the participants aligns with broader scholarship on Islamic contributions to global citizenship and

pluralism (Saada, 2023). Rather than constructing Islamic education as insular, the lecturers described graduates as socially responsible actors whose knowledge must serve ethical purposes. This positioning situates Islamic higher education within global discourses on civic engagement while retaining distinctive theological grounding. At the same time, tensions regarding evaluation systems expose structural dilemmas. When the participants questioned how sincerity can be measured, they highlighted the epistemological limits of indicator-based assessment. These concerns parallel critiques of audit culture that caution against narrowing educational purposes to measurable outputs (Koopman & Koopman, 2023). Thus, the study reveals not only pedagogical adaptation but also normative critique of dominant quality paradigms.

The lecturers' practices demonstrate a form of constrained autonomy. They do not possess the structural power to redesign accreditation regimes, yet they exercise interpretive agency in how standards are enacted. This dynamic reflects broader scholarship on curriculum policy and teacher autonomy in standardized systems (Dieudé & Prøitz, 2024). Agency, in this context, is discursive and pedagogical rather than structural. Their mediation can, therefore, be understood as intellectual stewardship. The lecturers safeguard Islamic epistemological commitments while ensuring students remain globally competitive. This dual responsibility underscores the complexity of academic labor in faith-based institutions operating within globalized higher education systems. Rather than portraying lecturers as either resistant traditionalists or compliant technocrats, the findings reveal them as reflective actors navigating structural tension with strategic discernment.

The study contributes to globalization theory by complicating homogenization narratives. It demonstrates that internationalization in non-Western religious institutions unfolds through dialogical reinterpretation rather than unilateral imposition. Islamic higher education in Indonesia emerges not as peripheral mimicry but as an active site of epistemic negotiation. At the same time, the persistence of translation work signals enduring global asymmetries. For genuine epistemic pluralism to flourish, international quality frameworks must become more philosophically inclusive, recognizing moral and spiritual dimensions as legitimate educational outcomes rather than ancillary values. Without such inclusivity, negotiation will remain adaptive rather than transformative.

Ultimately, this discussion suggests that the future of Islamic higher education depends not on rejecting global standards nor surrendering to them but on sustaining principled balance. The lecturers' narratives reveal a moderated internationalization that is consistent with Indonesia's reformist Islamic tradition (Azra, 2023). Their efforts to align global competence with Islamic integrity represent a sophisticated pedagogical synthesis grounded in ethical commitment. By foregrounding this negotiated process, the study redefines academic excellence as the capacity to engage global knowledge systems while preserving epistemological authenticity. In doing so, it challenges narrow metric-based definitions of quality and advances a morally grounded vision of higher education that is simultaneously globally connected and intellectually rooted.

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study generate several important implications at theoretical, pedagogical, and policy levels, extending beyond descriptive accounts and toward meaningful contributions to the field of higher education and Islamic pedagogy. First, at the theoretical level, this study advances the concept of negotiated internationalization by demonstrating that the interaction between global pedagogical standards and Islamic educational values is neither oppositional nor assimilative, but dialogical and interpretive. The lecturers' practices show that global frameworks such as OBE and SCL do not operate as fixed or universally applied models; rather, they are recontextualized through Islamic epistemological constructs such as *ijtihad*, *shura*, *tarbiyah*, and *ta'dib*.

These finding challenges dominant globalization narratives that assume epistemological uniformity (Shahjahan & Grimm, 2023; Tight, 2022) and contributes to emerging scholarship on epistemological pluralism by positioning Islamic education as an active producer of pedagogical knowledge rather than a passive recipient. Hence, the study calls for a reconceptualization of educational quality frameworks to incorporate moral and spiritual dimensions as legitimate and integral components of academic excellence.

Second, at the pedagogical level, the findings imply that lecturers play a critical role as epistemic mediators who translate, reinterpret, and integrate global pedagogical concepts within local moral-intellectual traditions. This suggests that effective teaching in Islamic higher education requires not only technical competence in contemporary pedagogical approaches but also the capacity to align these approaches critically with Islamic values. Consequently, professional development programs should move beyond procedural training in global standards (e.g., OBE, accreditation compliance) and toward fostering reflective pedagogical literacy. Such programs need to equip lecturers with conceptual tools to articulate how Islamic principles can meaningfully inform curriculum design, classroom interaction, and assessment practices. This also implies that teaching-excellence frameworks in Islamic universities should explicitly recognize ethical formation and character development as core pedagogical outcomes rather than treating them as implicit or secondary elements.

Third, at the institutional and policy level, the study highlights a structural tension between global quality assurance systems and the holistic aims of Islamic education. While accreditation and performance indicators are necessary for institutional legitimacy, the findings demonstrate that current evaluation systems remain limited in capturing non-quantifiable dimensions such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), moral integrity, and ethical responsibility. Therefore, policymakers and accreditation bodies should consider developing more inclusive and context-sensitive quality frameworks that allow for qualitative indicators and narrative-based evidence of student development. Incorporating reflective assessments, ethical portfolios, or community engagement outcomes could provide more comprehensive measures of educational quality that align with the missions of faith-based institutions.

Fourth, the study carries implications for curriculum design, particularly in integrating global competencies with Islamic ethical frameworks. The findings suggest that alignment is most effective when Islamic values are not appended as separate modules but are embedded within learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and pedagogical strategies. This implies that curriculum developers should adopt an integrative approach in which cognitive, ethical, and social dimensions of learning are designed as interconnected components. Such an approach would enable Islamic universities to maintain global competitiveness while preserving epistemological authenticity.

Finally, at a broader level, this study contributes to ongoing discussions on decolonizing higher education by illustrating how non-Western educational traditions can engage global standards without losing their intellectual sovereignty (Mendes, 2023). However, the need for continuous 'translation' of Islamic concepts into globally recognizable terminology also indicates persistent epistemic asymmetries. Therefore, a more equitable model of internationalization requires not only local adaptation but also structural openness within global frameworks to diverse knowledge systems. In sum, the implications of this study suggest that the future development of Islamic higher education depends on sustaining a principled balance between global engagement and epistemological rootedness. By recognizing lecturers as key agents of this negotiation, institutions and policymakers can better support pedagogical practices that are both globally relevant and ethically grounded.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how lecturers in an Islamic Education Department negotiate global pedagogical standards within an Islamic epistemological framework. The findings demonstrate that globalization in higher education is not experienced as a linear or imposed process but as a negotiated, interpretive, and contextually mediated practice. Lecturers engage with global standards such as OBE, accreditation systems, and measurable learning outcomes not merely as technical requirements but as value-laden frameworks that require reinterpretation.

At the same time, Islamic epistemology functions as a normative anchor, shaping how pedagogical practices are enacted through principles such as *tarbiyah*, *ta'dib*, *akhlaq*, *shura*, and *ijtihad*. Through strategies of adaptation, reinterpretation, and selective critique, lecturers position themselves as mediators who balance institutional compliance with ethical and intellectual commitments. This process ultimately leads to a reconceptualization of academic achievement such as the integration of cognitive competence, moral integrity, and social responsibility.

Theoretically, this study contributes to debates on globalization and faith-based higher education by advancing the notion of negotiated epistemic alignment in which global pedagogical standards and local religious epistemologies are brought into dynamic dialogue. The findings challenge homogenizing and binary narratives of globalization as either domination or resistance and instead, highlight the role of lecturers as epistemic mediators who actively reinterpret global knowledge within Islamic intellectual traditions. In doing so, the study

broadens prevailing understandings of educational quality by foregrounding moral-intellectual integration as a legitimate and necessary dimension of academic excellence.

Practically, the findings suggest that Islamic higher education institutions can engage productively with global standards without compromising their epistemological foundations. Institutional leaders and curriculum developers should create structured spaces for integrating Islamic ethical principles within outcome-based frameworks, ensuring that values such as integrity, responsibility, and character formation are explicitly embedded in learning outcomes and assessment practices. Furthermore, policymakers and accreditation bodies are encouraged to adopt more holistic and context-sensitive quality assurance systems that move beyond purely quantitative indicators and include qualitative dimensions of student development. Such reforms would help reduce the tension between accountability demands and the broader educational purposes of faith-based institutions.

This study is not without limitations. It relies on interview data from a single institutional context and focuses primarily on lecturers' perspectives. Therefore, caution is required in generalizing the findings across diverse settings. Future research should extend this work by incorporating multiple data sources, including classroom observations, curriculum documents, and student perspectives, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how negotiated pedagogical practices are enacted. Comparative studies across different Islamic higher education institutions, both within Indonesia and internationally, would also be valuable in identifying contextual variations and common patterns.

Additionally, further research is needed to explore innovative assessment models that are capable of capturing ethical and character development alongside cognitive achievement. Overall, this study highlights that the future of Islamic higher education lies not in rejecting global pedagogical standards nor uncritically adopting them but in sustaining a principled balance through ongoing epistemological negotiation.

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7. References

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