

# Collaboration between *Nahdlatul Ulama* and Higher Education in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education in Indonesia

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## Abstract

This research is a descriptive qualitative study that discusses collaboration and strategies to improve the quality of higher education managed by *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) with the New Institutionalism theory approach as an analytical framework. NU as the largest socio-religious organisation in Indonesia has developed a higher education model that integrates pesantren tradition, moderate Islamic science, and an institutional approach (LPTNU) that is adaptive to the challenges of the times. Innovative strategies in the form of integration of keulamaan research and global santri academic networks are designed to strengthen academic capacity, expand international collaboration, and promote Islamic values in the global academic space. The results of this study show that the synergy between institutional foundation, value-based strategy and international cooperation is a strategic combination in creating a sustainable, competitive and socially relevant transformation of Islamic higher education.

Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif deskriptif yang membahas kolaborasi dan strategi peningkatan kualitas pendidikan tinggi yang dikelola oleh *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU). NU sebagai organisasi sosial-keagamaan terbesar di Indonesia telah mengembangkan model pendidikan tinggi yang mengintegrasikan tradisi pesantren, keilmuan Islam moderat, dan pendekatan kelembagaan (LPTNU) yang adaptif terhadap tantangan zaman. Strategi inovatif berupa integrasi riset keulamaan dan jejaring akademik santri global yang dirancang untuk memperkuat kapasitas akademik, memperluas kolaborasi internasional, serta mempromosikan nilai-nilai Islam dalam ruang akademik global. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa sinergi antara landasan institusional, strategi berbasis nilai dan kerja sama internasional merupakan kombinasi strategis dalam menciptakan transformasi pendidikan tinggi Islam yang berkelanjutan, berdaya saing, dan relevan secara sosial.

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education has a fundamental role in determining the direction of the nation's development, both in terms of developing science, creating superior human resources, and as a catalyst for social engineering. As centres of research and innovation, universities contribute to finding solutions to various national challenges through scientific studies and applied technology.<sup>1</sup> This role is strengthened by the enactment of Law *NU* mber 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System as a legal umbrella in managing higher education. Currently, the development of education in higher education in Indonesia shows significant dynamics, especially in the aspect of digital transformation and technology-based learning. Such educational developments certainly have logical consequences, namely the emergence of gaps between universities with various factors.

Today, the quality gap between universities in Indonesia, both in terms of human resources, infrastructure, and institutional capacity is still strongly felt. Private universities in fact still have difficulty keeping up with the developments that occur on well-known campuses. This quality disparity can certainly clarify the inequality of access to quality higher education, so that affirmative policies and institutional capacity building are needed equally.<sup>2</sup> With collaborative efforts between the government, universities, organisations and the community, higher education in Indonesia is expected to continue to develop inclusively and sustainably. Indonesia as the country with the largest Muslim population in the world shows a strong religious identity and confirms Indonesia's position as an important centre in the development of moderate Islam that is tolerant and contextual to national values. According to data from the Pew Research Center and the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2022, around 87% of Indonesia's total population<sup>3</sup> or around 242 million people<sup>4</sup> choose to embrace Islam as the actualisation of the first principle in Pancasila. This phenomenon is

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<sup>1</sup> Asmaa Abusamra, "The Role of Community Colleges in Developing Creativity and Innovation Skills of Vocational Students (The University College of Applied Science as a Case Study)," *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences* 49, no. 2 (August 2, 2022): 583–98, <https://doi.org/10.35516/hum.v49i2.1817>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Osborne, "The Barriers to Access in Higher Education and Their Alleviation," in *Routledge Handbook of the Sociology of Higher Education* (London: Routledge, 2022), 160–73, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003262497-16>.

<sup>3</sup> K. Cailleigh Stirling, "5 Facts About Muslims and Christians in Indonesia," [https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/28/5-facts-about-muslims-and-christians-in-indonesia/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/03/28/5-facts-about-muslims-and-christians-in-indonesia/?utm_source=chatgpt.com), March 28, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, "Jumlah Penduduk Menurut Agama: SATU DATA Kementerian Agama RI," <https://satudata.kemenag.go.id/dataset/detail/jumlah-penduduk-menurut-agama>, August 24, 2022.

the background for the emergence of several Islamic organisations as a forum for the community to achieve a life that is in accordance with Islamic faith and sharia.

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) is the largest Islamic organisation in Indonesia, founded on 31 January 1926 by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari together with Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah pesantren scholars.<sup>5</sup> The establishment of *NU* was motivated by the desire to maintain traditional Islamic teachings and respond to various religious problems, the affirmation of mazhab, as well as national and societal reasons. *NU* is committed to maintaining moderate and tolerant Islamic values, as well as strengthening the role of ulama in the social and religious life of Indonesian society. The presence of *NU* is considered to have provided a very significant breath of fresh air for the development of the capacity of Indonesian society in terms of religion, social interaction, and education. With this in mind, there is public confidence to choose Islamic universities as an alternative in determining their career and future. In the field of education, *NU* has made significant contributions through the establishment of various educational institutions, ranging from primary to tertiary levels. Ma'arif *NU* Education Institute is an autonomous institution that manages thousands of madrasas and schools spread throughout Indonesia, both in rural areas and in big cities.<sup>6</sup> In addition, *NU* also takes part at the tertiary level such as the establishment of *Nahdlatul Ulama* University (UNU) in various provinces which aims to produce young people with noble character and national insight.

As an effort to improve the quality of Islamic education, especially at the tertiary level, *NU* has made several innovations and strategic studies that are deemed necessary to be of concern. Based on the vision of one of the UNUs in Indonesia, improving the quality of superior Islamic education in Indonesia needs to be actualised with the character of Ahlussunnah Wal Jamaah (Aswaja) An-nahdliyah. Aswaja An-nahdliyah is a religious view that is the basis for *NU* in carrying out moderate, tolerant and inclusive Islamic teachings. Aswaja An-nahdliyah emphasises the importance of following the sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, the ijma' of the scholars as well as the Islamic traditions maintained by Muslims since the time of the Prophet.<sup>7</sup> Currently, *NU* has around 30

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<sup>5</sup> Fathoni Ahmad, "Sejarah Singkat Berdirinya *Nahdlatul Ulama*," [https://www.nu.or.id/fragmen/sejarah-singkat-berdirinya-nahdlatul-ulama-VpzA0?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.nu.or.id/fragmen/sejarah-singkat-berdirinya-nahdlatul-ulama-VpzA0?utm_source=chatgpt.com), January 31, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Muallif, "Peran *NU* Dalam Dunia Pendidikan," <https://an-nur.ac.id/peran-nu-dalam-dunia-pendidikan/>, April 2, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Bahrul Ulum, "Ahlussunnah Waljamaah A-Nahdliyah KH Bisri Musthofa," <https://jateng.nu.or.id/opini/ahlussunnah-waljamaah-a-nahdliyah-kh-bisri-musthofa-WoKyx>, September 1, 2021.

universities spread throughout Indonesia. *NU* universities (PTNU) are covered by an *NU* Higher Education Institution (LPTNU) which is an educational unit that coordinates PTNU, whether organised by an association or organised by another legal entity and places itself as part of LPTNU. This can certainly strengthen integration between *NU* universities both in terms of institutional management and strategic studies. This research will discuss: a. How the role of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) in improving the quality of education as a higher education institution, and b. How the form of strategic studies conducted by *NU* in an effort to improve the quality of education in higher education.

Previous research has been conducted by Ruswan, who examined the historical changes that have occurred in PTNU since the reform era in Indonesia. The results of the study were the centralised management by LPTNU and the increase in the *NU* number of study programmes and demographic changes experienced by various PTNUs in Indonesia.<sup>8</sup> Another research was conducted by Ima Rosila which discussed the contribution of *NU* in the development of education through the perspective of history and social transformation. The result of the research is that *NU* not only contributes to pesantren-based education, but is also active in establishing formal educational institutions that involve themselves in the formation of the national curriculum and by promoting the values of pluralism and nationalism in education.<sup>9</sup> The difference between this research and previous research is that the research conducted focuses on *NU* collaboration with universities in an effort to improve the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia, which is studied through an institutional and strategic approach. So that the results of this study can provide new insights to the public about how *NU* can take part intensively and massively in improving the quality of Islamic university management.

## METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach, by analysing various literatures from both digital platforms and supporting scientific journals.<sup>10</sup> In this research, the main focus is on institutional and strategic studies of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) as an Islamic organisation as well as a higher education provider in

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<sup>8</sup> Ruswan, "Apropriasi Perguruan Tinggi *Nahdlatul Ulama* Pada Era Reformasi," *Islamic Review: Jurnal Riset Dan Kajian Keislaman* 12, no. 1 (April 17, 2023): 103–16.

<sup>9</sup> Ima Rosila and Abdul Khobir, "Kontribusi *Nahdlatul Ulama* Dalam Pengembangan Pendidikan Di Indonesia Pasca-Kemerdekaan: Sebuah Kajian Sejarah Dan Transformasi Sosial," *Jurnal Nakula : Pusat Ilmu Pendidikan, Bahasa Dan Ilmu Sosial* 3, no. 1 (December 24, 2025): 191–208.

<sup>10</sup> Danhua Peng and Zhonggen Yu, "A Literature Review of Digital Literacy over Two Decades," *Education Research International* 2022 (May 17, 2022): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/2533413>.

Indonesia. Institutional studies is an approach in social science, especially in the fields of political science, sociology, and public administration, which focuses on the analysis of both formal and non-formal institutions in influencing individual behaviour, policy processes, and social structures.<sup>11</sup> Institutional studies are often used to understand how values, organisational structures and internal mechanisms are related to *NU*'s role in improving the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Meanwhile, strategic studies defined as a multidisciplinary approach that aims to analyse, formulate and evaluate long-term policies or actions that are important and decisive in achieving certain goals both in the context of countries, organisations and certain sectors such as education, security or development.<sup>12</sup> The data collection technique in this research is using a literature review approach. The literature studies carried out are in the form of documentary research, scientific journal reviews, online research, content analysis and historical literature studies.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### **The Role of *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) in Improving the Quality of Education as an Islamic Higher Education Institution**

The existence of Islamic universities in Indonesia has a very important position. This is due to the role of Islamic universities as the main pillar in building a knowledgeable, moral and competitive society. As a country with the largest Muslim population in the world, Indonesia certainly needs an educational institution that not only develops intellectual intelligence, but also fosters the morals and spirituality of the younger generation. Islamic higher education is a place to integrate religious knowledge with modern science, so as to produce graduates who are not only academically competent, but also have social awareness, tolerance and national spirit.<sup>13</sup> In facing global challenges such as radicalism, moral crisis and technological disruption, Islamic universities have a strategic position to provide answers based on moderate Islamic values and Indonesian faces.

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<sup>11</sup> Samue I Agyei Agyare and Janet Mola Okoko, "Institutional Ethnography," 2023, 263–68, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04394-9\\_42](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-04394-9_42).

<sup>12</sup> Rastislav Kazanský and Jurjaj Cséfalvay, "Strategic Studies, Strategy, and Strategic Thinking in Study of Security," *National Security and the Future* 24, no. 2 (July 4, 2023): 7–30, <https://doi.org/10.37458/nstf.24.2.1>.

<sup>13</sup> Bassam Abul A'la, Sugito Muzaqi, and Miftahul Alimin, "Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam Pendekatan Multidisipliner, Interdisipliner Dan Transdisipliner Di Perguruan Tinggi," *Edupedia : Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Dan Pedagogi Islam* 7, no. 2 (January 30, 2023): 143–52, <https://doi.org/10.35316/edupedia.v7i2.2467>.

So far, there are 2937 universities recorded in the database of the Badan Pusat Statistik RI<sup>14</sup>, consisting of state universities and private universities. A total of 879 universities are organised into Islamic Religious Universities (PTKI)<sup>15</sup> and 30 of them are part of PTNU<sup>16</sup>. In addition, at least the data available at BAN-PT shows as many as 61 universities that have names with *NU* elements.

**Table 1.** List of *NU* Universities

No	College code	Name of College
1	082011	Institus Sains dan Teknologi <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Bali
2	051023	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Yogyakarta
3	031061	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Indonesia
4	161020	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Gorontalo
5	102008	Institut Teknologi dan Sains <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Jambi
6	213645	Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Dakwah dan Komunikasi Islam <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Indramayu
7	062004	Institut Teknologi dan Sains <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Pekalongan
8	061041	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Al Ghazali Cilacap
9	063100	STKIP <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Kabupaten Tegal
10	212104	Institut Islam <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Temanggung
11	061040	Universitas Ma'arif <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Kebumen
12	061045	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Purwokerto
13	071082	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sidoarjo
14	212086	Institut Agama Islam <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Tuban
15	072029	Institut Ilmu Kesehatan <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Tuban
16	072018	Institut Teknologi dan Sains <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Pasuruan
17	071088	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sunan Giri
18	071090	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Blitar
19	111022	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Kalimantan Barat
20	111021	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Kalimantan Selatan
21	112006	Institut Teknologi dan Sains <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Kalimantan
22	111020	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Kalimantan Timur
23	021026	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Lampung
24	022009	Institut Teknologi dan Sains <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Lampung

<sup>14</sup> Badan Pusat Statistik, "Jumlah Perguruan Tinggi Di Bawah Kemdiktisaintek 2024," <https://www.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/3/Y21kVGRHNXZVMEI3S3pCRllyMHJRbnB1WkVZemR6MDkjMw==/jumlah-perguruan-tinggi1--dosen--dan-mahasiswa2--negeri-dan-swasta--di-bawah-kementerian-pendidikan--kebudayaan--riset--dan-teknologi--menurut-provinsi--2022.html>, February 19, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Kementerian Agama RI, "Profil Lembaga Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam," <https://diktis.kemenag.go.id/kelembagaan/kemenag2/>, May 12, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> Lembaga Perguruan Tinggi *Nahdlatul Ulama*, "Daftar Kampus *Nahdlatul Ulama*," <https://IPTNU.or.id/perkumpulan/>, May 12, 2025.

25	081032	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> NU sa Tenggara Barat
26	091050	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sulawesi Tenggara
27	101028	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sumatera Barat
28	022010	Institut Teknologi dan Sains <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sriwijaya Sumatera Selatan
29	011047	Universitas <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sumatera Utara
30	214009	Institut Agama Islam <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> Sumatera Selatan

Source: Lembaga Pendidikan Tinggi *Nahdlatul Ulama* (12/05/25)

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) as an Islamic organisation as well as a university manager (PTNU) certainly has its own unique characteristics. Quoted from the NU Online website, NU 's work in opening Islamic universities is actually intended as a window for the nation's children who want to see a new world and gain factual knowledge.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the establishment of PTNU in Indonesia is a form of devotion from NU to Indonesia in the field of education.

In the study of institutionalism, the New Institutionalism theory is known. New Institutionalism is a theory that emphasises that actors' behaviour is not only influenced by economic rationality, but also by social norms and institutional structures that regulate interaction patterns.<sup>18</sup> New Institutionalism views that an institution has a major role in shaping logic and action (discretion), not just as a neutral container. *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) as an institution in PTNU also influences the balance between religion and economic rationality and becomes a pillar in the development of knowledge in higher education.

Through the theory of New Institutionalism, we can analyse how the values, norms and institutional structure of NU as a university manager can shape the policy patterns, management and development direction of Islamic higher education under its auspices. When examined using the New Institutionalism perspective, NU 's higher education structure and policies cannot be separated from the influence of NU 's own organisational culture. NU is closely associated with moderation, civility and openness to modern science. Institutional practices such as curriculum based on the integration of religious and general sciences, the participation of ulama in academic structures, and a strong national orientation are manifestations of institutional logic shaped by NU 's historical norms and identity.

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<sup>17</sup> Muhammad Faizin, "Untuk Apa NU Mendirikan Perguruan Tinggi? Ini Penjelasan Ketum PBNU," <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/untuk-apa-nu-mendirikan-perguruan-tinggi-ini-penjelasan-ketum-pbnu-GF17f>, December 26, 2023.

<sup>18</sup> Anastasiya A. Sozinova, "Investigating the Prospects of New Institutional Theory in the Smart Economy," 2021, 2075–81, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69415-9\\_227](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-69415-9_227).

There are at least 8 to 10 compulsory university courses in the PTNU curriculum. These compulsory university courses can then be broken down into approximately 16 to 22 credits (semester credit units). Each course distribution and SKS load offered, depends on the managing university and has been adjusted to the curriculum development in the study programme.

**Table 2.** Sample of Course Distribution at *NU* Universities

No	Credits Load	Course Name
1	2	Pendidikan Agama
2	2	Pendidikan Kewarganegaraan
3	2	Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia
4	2	Ahlusunnah Wal Jama'ah (bisa dirinci menjadi 4 makul)
5	2	Pendidikan Pancasila
6	2	Ke <i>Nahdlatul Ulama</i> an
7	2	Bahasa Arab
8	2	Bahasa Inggris
9	2	Kewirausahaan
10	4	Kuliah Kerja Nyata

Source: processed by the author (14/05/25)

The preparation of the curriculum at PTNU which includes Ahlusunnah Wal Jama'ah An-nadliyah (Aswajana) courses is not without reason. According to Marzuki Wahid (Chairman of the Aswajana Curriculum and Book Formulation Team) there are at least 9 subjects in the course including: akidah, fiqh, tasawuf, ijtimai'iyah (society), iqtishadiyah (economy), siyasah (politics), science and technology, insaniyah (humanity) and bi'ah (environment).<sup>19</sup>

This phenomenon indicates that decision-making in LPTNU reflects the logic of appropriateness, which is the compatibility between values and organisational identity, rather than simply relying on the logic of efficiency. Thus, using New Institutionalism theory proves to provide a strong analytical basis for understanding the dynamics and strategic orientation of *NU* higher education as an organisation with an Indonesian social and cultural perspective.

### **A Study of Strategies Implemented by *NU* in Efforts to Improve the Quality of Education as an Islamic Higher Education Institution**

<sup>19</sup> Aru Lego Triono, "Kurikulum Dan Buku Ajar Aswaja An-Nahdliyah Terstandar Nasional Jadi Kebutuhan PTNU," <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/kurikulum-dan-buku-ajar-aswaja-an-nahdliyah-terstandar-nasional-jadi-kebutuhan-PTNU-uFLs1>, February 17, 2023.

Strategising efforts to improve the quality of education in higher education is a fundamental step to ensure that higher education institutions are able to adapt and compete in the midst of global dynamics.<sup>20</sup> A systematically developed strategy confirms universities in designing measurable institutional development directions, including in aspects of curriculum, lecturer quality, infrastructure, and governance. With the right strategy, universities can provide education that is relevant to the needs of the times, produce graduates who excel academically, and have high integrity and competitiveness in the world of work and society. Strategic planning makes it possible for an institution to anticipate external challenges, such as technological developments, globalisation of education, and changes in government regulations.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, a well-thought-out strategy is very helpful for universities to establish productive partnerships with various parties, including the government, industry, and local communities.<sup>22</sup> This is important to do in order to build a collaborative and sustainable education ecosystem in accordance with the '*Asta Cita*' programme launched by the President of the Republic of Indonesia, Prabowo Subianto. In Indonesia, the role of strategy is even more crucial as many universities, especially those that are faith-based or private, will certainly experience difficulties in dealing with limited resources and access. By developing a strategy based on a strong vision and mission as well as analysing internal strengths and weaknesses, universities can formulate innovative steps to improve academic quality and overall education services.<sup>23</sup>

*Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) has implemented various strategies to improve the quality of education in the universities they manage. Through the *Nahdlatul Ulama* Higher Education Institute (LPTNU), NU designed six strategic steps

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<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Deni, "Strategic Management of Higher College in Improving the Quality of Education STIKES Health Darussalam Lhokseumawe Aceh," *International Journal of Business, Economics & Management* 5, no. 4 (October 3, 2022): 246–52, <https://doi.org/10.21744/ijbem.v5n4.1962>.

<sup>21</sup> Ehab A. Naas, "Development Challenges And Their Impact On Strategic Planning," *RIMAK International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (May 1, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.47832/2717-8293.17.4>.

<sup>22</sup> Kristin K. Frady, "A Practical Workforce Development Framework Using Strategies and Initiatives to Strengthen the Mature Workforce," 2020, 237–69, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-2277-6.ch010>.

<sup>23</sup> Ghassan Qasim Daud Alamy, "Strategic Vision and Its Relationship to Continuous Improvement of Institutional Performance - Field Research at the Ministry of Higher Education," in *Proceedings of "Economic and Administrative Reform: Necessities and Challenges" Conference* (University of Human Development, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.21928/uhdicearnc/7>.

including:<sup>24</sup> First, integration of PTNU data. LPTNU as an institution that oversees the management of universities, has conducted an inventory of assets at each PTNU to estimate the strengths and weaknesses as an effort to improve the quality of education. Second, reconstruction of PTNU's vision and mission. Pengurus Besar *Nahdlatul Ulama* (PBNU) together with the leaders of PTNU have massively and structurally adjusted the vision and mission of the university to be in line with the times and able to face future challenges. Third, information system development at PTNU. In an effort to build an information system that facilitates access and networking for the community and students in obtaining information about PTNU, various platforms have been provided by LPTNU, both in the form of websites and social media. In addition, the blended learning method (learning management system) has also been applied at PTNU as a form of alignment of the world of education with technology. Fourth, determination of LPTNU membership criteria. In determining the criteria for universities that will become members, LPTNU has a step-by-step process that is in accordance with *Aswaja*. This will certainly strengthen LPTNU in the integration of social and religious values that cannot be separated from its role as a university manager. Fifth, digitalisation of PTNU administration. By developing a digital secretarial system, it certainly facilitates administrative access for the entire PTNU academic community. Forms of administrative interests such as correspondence, requests, permits and cooperation can be carried out with digital media. Sixth, improved scholarship programme for PTNU students. As a form of devotion to religion, society and the state, *NU* has developed a scholarship programme to improve the quality of education and prepare superior human resources within *NU*. The scholarships offered are not only internal *NU* scholarships, but also collaboration with the Indonesian government.

To complement the above strategies, this research offers at least 2 (two) additional strategies that can be done as an effort to improve the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia, namely: First, integration of *keulamaan* research. In order to develop religious-academic research, it is necessary to implement an interdisciplinary research programme involving lecturers, students, and ulama. The integration of Islamic research serves to discuss contemporary issues from a scientific and religious perspective. For example, research on Islamic ethics in the digital sphere, adaptive Islamic environments,

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<sup>24</sup> Abdul Manap, "LPTNU Rancang Sistem Pendidikan Tinggi *NU* Dengan Enam Langkah Strategis," [https://jabar.nu.or.id/nasional/IPTNU-rancang-sistem-pendidikan-tinggi-nu-dengan-enam-langkah-strategis-e7nam?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://jabar.nu.or.id/nasional/IPTNU-rancang-sistem-pendidikan-tinggi-nu-dengan-enam-langkah-strategis-e7nam?utm_source=chatgpt.com), October 30, 2023.

sharia economics, or transformative Islamic education based on civil society. Second, global *Santri* academic network. This strategy aims to build collaborative networks between students, alumni, and academics from santri and pesantren backgrounds, both at the national and international levels, as a source of innovation, scientific exchange, and improving campus academic quality. Such cooperation certainly has more impactful and tangible results, because it has the same vision and mission, namely improving the quality of Islamic education.

The integration of keulamaan research and global santri academic networks has a significant impact on improving the quality of higher education institutions, especially those that are Islamic-based such as some PTNU. Keulamaan research that raises the treasures of classical Islamic knowledge such as kitab kuning studies, social fiqh, or Sufism thinking, if collaborated with cross-country santri academic networks, will produce scientific innovations that are contextual as well as global standards. This collaboration not only enriches academic perspectives, but also expands the space for scientific publications and intercultural exchange of ideas.

The involvement of santri in global academic networks strengthens the competitiveness of campus human resources in facing the challenges of the digital era and globalisation. Students and lecturers who are active in the international research community will be encouraged to improve the quality of their scientific work, keep up with the latest research methodologies, and establish strategic partnerships across countries. This will have a direct impact on accreditation, scientific reputation, and the institution's capacity to create graduates who are not only intellectually and spiritually proficient, but also globally relevant.

## CONCLUSION

Basically, improving the quality of higher education is not only determined by the formal structure of the institution, but also by the social norms, values and practices that shape academic culture in a sustainable manner. The new institutionalism approach emphasises the importance of institutional legitimacy formed through adaptation to the social, cultural and political environment. *NU*'s efforts to improve the quality of education have been reflected in its efforts to build a university based on pesantren values, moderate Islam, and local wisdom.

The integration of strategies based on keulamaan research and global santri academic networks is a new innovation that enriches *NU*'s strategic approach to higher education development. This strategy not only strengthens the conventional scientific foundation, but also opens space for scientific

collaboration at the international level, encourages the exchange of ideas, and expands access to global academic resources.

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