



Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi: A Beacon of Change in Enhancing the Quality of Inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to analyze the institutional conditions, leadership challenges, and strategic efforts of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in improving the quality of inclusive private Islamic higher education institutions in Jambi Province to support sustainable academic and institutional development.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach using a purposive sampling technique to select key academic leaders and stakeholders from Kopertais Region XII Jambi, including rectors, vice rectors, and heads of Islamic higher education institutions. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation, then analyzed using Creswell's phenomenological framework reduction, horizontalization, clustering, and synthesis with triangulation ensuring validity and reliability of findings.

Main Findings: The State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi achieved significant progress in accreditation, faculty development, and institutional transformation, serving as a model for inclusive private Islamic higher education. Findings reveal internal and external leadership barriers, including limited motivation, time, and collaboration. Leaders implemented strategies such as digital-based management, human resource development, and continuous mentoring to enhance institutional quality.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study introduces a new perspective by integrating institutional transformation, leadership challenges, and strategic digital-based management within the framework of Kopertais Region XII. It advances existing knowledge by presenting the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi as a replicable model for improving the quality and inclusivity of private Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Change is an inevitable aspect of human civilization, encompassing transitions in attitudes, behavior, and social structures. In the context of education, transformation represents a deliberate effort to improve systems, outcomes, and institutional quality. According to Yusraini, Maisah, & Musli [1], converting private Islamic religious colleges into institutes constitutes one such strategic move to enhance the quality of inclusive Islamic higher education. Universities are thus required to produce competent graduates who are capable of

contributing to knowledge dissemination and social development [2], [3]. This dynamic situates higher education institutions as active agents in the pursuit of continuous improvement and innovation [4], [5].

Over the past decade, Indonesia has undergone significant social change that has reshaped religious, cultural, political, and educational institutions. These transformations have brought both opportunities and challenges to Islamic higher education, which plays a critical role in shaping the moral and intellectual foundations of society [6], [7]. The increasing demand for quality education has led institutions to seek accreditation excellence as a measure of credibility and competitiveness [8], [9]. Within this landscape, institutional transformation is not merely administrative but also philosophical, involving re-orientation toward inclusive and sustainable quality [10], [11]. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of organizational change in Islamic higher education becomes a central academic concern [12], [13]. For instance, organizational change in education has been described as the movement from a current state toward a desired future state, driven by internal and external factors [14].

Islamic higher education institutions, particularly in Jambi Province, have become focal points of change within Indonesia's educational transformation agenda. The theological perspective that "Allah will not change a people's condition unless they change what is in themselves" (Qur'an Ra'd:11) parallels the mission of Islamic universities to embody transformation as both a spiritual and institutional mandate. Consequently, reform in Islamic higher education must integrate moral values, administrative excellence, and scientific innovation [15]- [17]. Such integration ensures that transformation efforts are holistic and rooted in Islamic ethical principles. Institutions like the one under study can therefore act as catalysts of change in their region.

The concept of quality in education is multifaceted, encompassing input, process, and output dimensions. Quality, according to Sallis [18] cited in subsequent Indonesian studies, is conceived as the process of meeting or exceeding stakeholder expectations encompassing not only educational processes but also institutional culture and human capital. In this regard, the pursuit of educational quality is inseparable from leadership, planning, continuous assessment, and human-resource competence. Higher education institutions must therefore manage change strategically in order to maintain relevance and competitiveness [19]-[21]. Effective change management becomes the key to institutional sustainability in higher education.

The transformation of the former institute into the state Islamic university under study marks a significant milestone in the region's academic landscape. This transformation embodies the university's role as a "beacon of change" for private Islamic higher education institutions in the region [22], [23]. With accreditation achievements and the establishment of new faculties, the university has positioned itself as a model for academic excellence and institutional modernization [24], [25]. However, these achievements also demand consistent leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and policy alignment to ensure that the change process benefits all affiliated institutions [26]-[28]. Hence, the role of the university goes beyond its own campus: it contributes to regional educational development and inclusive growth.

Despite the progress achieved, many private Islamic higher education institutions in Jambi Province still face challenges related to governance, resource availability, and academic quality [29]. Limited managerial continuity, insufficient facilities, weak collaboration networks, and lack of inclusive practices are among the key obstacles to sustainable quality assurance. As noted by researchers, improving educational quality requires nurturing human potential holistically intellectually, emotionally and spiritually so that graduates can face global competition with integrity [30], [31]. Addressing these barriers demands strategic guidance and consistent mentoring from leading institutions. Therefore, inter-institutional collaboration becomes an essential mechanism to strengthen inclusivity and resilience of Islamic higher education in the province.

Although numerous studies have examined leadership and institutional management in higher education, most have focused on public universities and paid limited attention to the unique challenges faced by private Islamic institutions. Marlia et al. [32], Fridiyanto and Firmansyah [33], emphasized the importance of adaptive and strategic leadership in institutional transformation, yet they did not explore how resource constraints influence leadership effectiveness in private settings. Similarly, Sahrodi and Karim [34], Mahadun et al. [35] discussed the role of leadership power and emotional intelligence in enhancing staff performance but failed to integrate Islamic values and governance systems comprehensively. Meanwhile, studies by Harianingsih et al. [36], Riofita [37], and Nasir [38] addressed strategies for improving academic performance and institutional innovation; however, their approaches remain fragmented and do not fully capture the interplay between inhibiting factors and institutional conditions. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by providing an integrated analysis of institutional conditions, leadership barriers, and strategic efforts to enhance academic, research, and community service performance within the context of private Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Given these considerations, the urgency of this study lies in analysing the strategic role of [the university] as a beacon of change in enhancing the quality of inclusive private Islamic higher education in Jambi Province. The main objectives of this research are to examine (1) the institutional conditions of the university in fostering educational quality, (2) the inhibiting factors faced by leadership in promoting improvement, and (3) the strategic efforts undertaken to enhance academic, research and community service performance. The findings

are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to leadership development and institutional management within the context of Islamic higher education. Ultimately, this study seeks to provide insights for strengthening an inclusive, competitive and sustainable educational system among private Islamic institutions in Indonesia. The significance of the study therefore aligns with broader national goals of educational equity and excellence.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach designed to explore and understand the lived experiences and perspectives of academic leaders regarding institutional transformation in Islamic higher education. The phenomenological design was chosen because it allows researchers to capture participants' subjective meanings and interpretations of change processes in their organizational context [39], [40]. The approach focuses on describing the essence of phenomena as perceived by individuals involved, rather than testing predetermined hypotheses [41], [42]. Through this method, the researcher aimed to reveal the underlying motivations, challenges, and strategic actions that define UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi as a *beacon of change* in enhancing the quality of inclusive private Islamic higher education.

The subjects of this research consisted of key academic leaders and stakeholders within the educational environment of Kopertais Region XII Jambi. These included the Rector and Vice Rectors of State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, the Secretary of Kopertais Region XII, as well as the Rectors of 13 Islamic Religious Institutes and the Chairpersons of 5 Islamic Religious Colleges across Jambi Province. The selection of participants was carried out purposively, considering their direct involvement in planning, implementing, and evaluating institutional quality improvement initiatives. Their perspectives provided diverse insights into leadership strategies, institutional barriers, and the mechanisms of collaboration among higher education institutions.

Data collection was conducted using three main techniques: in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation. In-depth interviews were used to obtain first-hand narratives from university leaders and institutional administrators about the dynamics of change and quality assurance. Document analysis was carried out by examining accreditation reports, institutional performance data, strategic plans, and policy documents relevant to State Islamic University Jambi and the affiliated institutions under Kopertais Region XII. Observation was employed to capture non-verbal interactions, leadership behaviors, and the organizational atmosphere during mentoring, evaluation, and coordination activities. All data collection processes adhered to ethical research standards, including confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation.

The data analysis technique followed the phenomenological framework proposed by Creswell, consisting of four main stages: (1) data reduction, which involved transcribing and organizing field notes, interviews, and documents; (2) horizontalization, identifying significant statements that represent participants' experiences; (3) clustering of meanings into thematic categories such as leadership roles, barriers, and institutional strategies; and (4) synthesis, integrating these themes into an overall description of the phenomenon under study [43]. Triangulation of data sources and methods was performed to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The interpretation process was iterative, moving back and forth between data and emerging concepts to maintain analytical depth and accuracy.

The research procedure began with a preparatory stage that included literature review, instrument development, and permission from institutional authorities. During the data collection stage, the researcher conducted depth-interview, document reviews, and observations across multiple Islamic higher education institutions in Jambi Province. The data analysis stage involved continuous coding and thematic interpretation concurrent with data collection to refine emerging insights. After analysis, the verification stage was carried out through member checking with several key informants to confirm the accuracy and credibility of interpretations. Finally, the reporting stage synthesized all findings into a comprehensive narrative highlighting the strategic role of State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi as a guiding model for quality enhancement in private Islamic higher education.

This methodological framework enabled a holistic understanding of institutional transformation, emphasizing the human, structural, and cultural dimensions of change. It provided not only empirical evidence but also interpretive depth regarding how leadership, policy, and collaboration drive inclusive educational quality in the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. Through the integration of multiple qualitative techniques, the study ensures a rich, contextualized, and trustworthy account of the phenomenon being explored.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Condition of UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in Developing Inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education in Jambi Province

Based on Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia No. 37 of 2017, the State Institute for Islamic Studies Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi officially transformed into the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. In his commencement address in 2017, Rector Hadri Hasan stated that this transformation signifies that the people of Jambi in general, and the academic community of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in particular, must become pioneers of change and contribute intellectually and professionally at the national level. However, with the formal change of status, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi is also faced with various challenges that must be addressed collectively with a spirit of awareness and dedication to advancing the region, religion, nation, and state.

First, the transformation of the State Institute for Islamic Studies into the State Islamic University requires a collective shift in mindset toward educational moderation in Jambi. This moderation should be implemented consistently in accordance with the vision and mission of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. Second, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi has established a distinctive scientific orientation that serves as the foundation of its academic paradigm, namely *Islamic Entrepreneurship*. In the years to come, the university will be challenged to realize and operationalize this distinctive concept by producing entrepreneurial graduates who can contribute to solving regional, national, and religious problems, rather than creating or intensifying existing ones. Third, through the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, the people of Jambi are encouraged to make positive contributions to humanity at both national and international levels. As modernity has created divisions within society and weakened empathy toward others, the university is expected to become a leading institution in promoting humanization and nurturing compassion through education.

Condition of Faculties and Existing Accreditation in 2024

According to the official documentation of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, comprehensive data have been collected regarding the current institutional condition, including the number of faculties, study programs, accreditation status, lecturers, students, academic journals, and global rankings. These data provide an overview of the university's academic development and quality assurance achievements as of 2024. The summary of the information related to the number of faculties, study programs, and their respective accreditation ratings can be seen in the Figure 1.

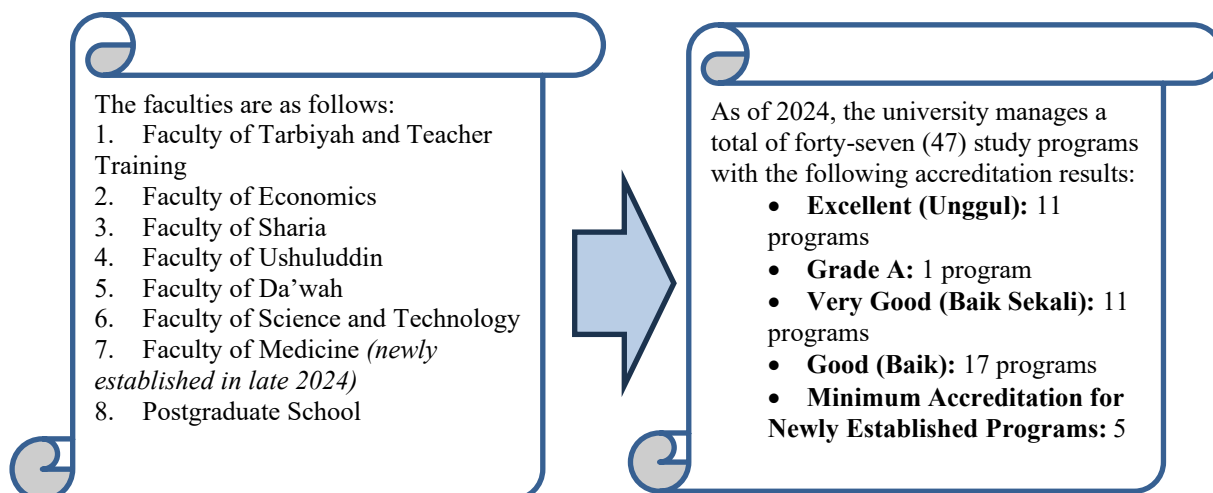


Figure 1. The organizational structure of faculties and the accreditation status of study programs at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in 2024.

Figure 1 illustrates that the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi currently comprises six long-established faculties and one postgraduate school, along with a newly established Faculty of Medicine, which officially received its operational permit in December 2024. At that time, the Acting Rector was Professor Dr. H. Ahmad Zainul Hamdi, M.Ag., under whose leadership the Faculty of Medicine is scheduled to admit its first cohort of students in 2025. The university's overall accreditation performance has increased significantly by approximately 182% with 31 study programs achieving *Excellent* status, and two additional postgraduate programs expected to obtain *Excellent* accreditation in early 2025. In the near future, the university is also preparing to apply for international accreditation for two study programs.

The excellence achieved in both institutional and program accreditation has positioned the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi as a benchmark and model for enhancing the quality of inclusive private Islamic higher education institutions under Kopertais Region XII in Jambi Province, including both Islamic Religious Institutes and Islamic Religious Colleges. Based on the researcher's observations, these achievements are the result of the strong leadership and collaborative efforts of all university stakeholders, who aspire to make the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi competitive with other State Islamic Universities across Indonesia whether those that transitioned from institutes simultaneously or those that transformed earlier.

The process of achieving these accreditation outcomes was not instantaneous but rather the culmination of long-term institutional preparation initiated by previous university leaders. The establishment of the Faculty of Medicine itself was the result of a rigorous and time-consuming process. According to university documentation, the proposal for the medical program began on May 15, 2022, followed by the submission for recommendation on December 26, 2022. Between December 2022 and September 2023, several stages of document revision were undertaken. Document evaluation was conducted on September 23, 2023, followed by report evaluation on September 25, 2023, and the submission of revised materials for field visitation on October 8, 2023. The Ministry of Education and Culture issued its recommendation on February 12, 2024, and after further improvements requested by LAM-PTKs on October 29 and November 8, 2024, the final decree establishing the Faculty of Medicine was officially issued in late December 2024.

Following this achievement, the university leadership and academic community worked diligently to prepare all necessary facilities for the Faculty of Medicine, including curriculum design, human resource recruitment, laboratory establishment, practical training modules, and tutorial systems. The opening of this new faculty marks not only a milestone for the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi but also aligns with the national government's "Red and White Cabinet" program, which aims to establish 300 new medical faculties across Indonesia.

Condition of Lecturers and Students in 2024

According to Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, Article 8 paragraphs (1) and (2) stipulate that lecturers must possess appropriate qualifications, competencies, and certifications. Paragraph (2) further explains that lecturers are required to demonstrate four core competencies: (1) pedagogical competence, (2) personal competence, (3) professional competence, and (4) social competence.

The State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi currently employs a total of 606 lecturers. Based on institutional documentation, the lecturers serving at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi have met the professional standards as mandated by the aforementioned law, fulfilling the necessary academic qualifications, certification requirements, and competency standards. This alignment reflects the university's strong commitment to maintaining academic quality through competent and qualified human resources.

For a clearer overview, the detailed distribution of academic ranks and positions of lecturers at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi can be seen in the following figure 2.

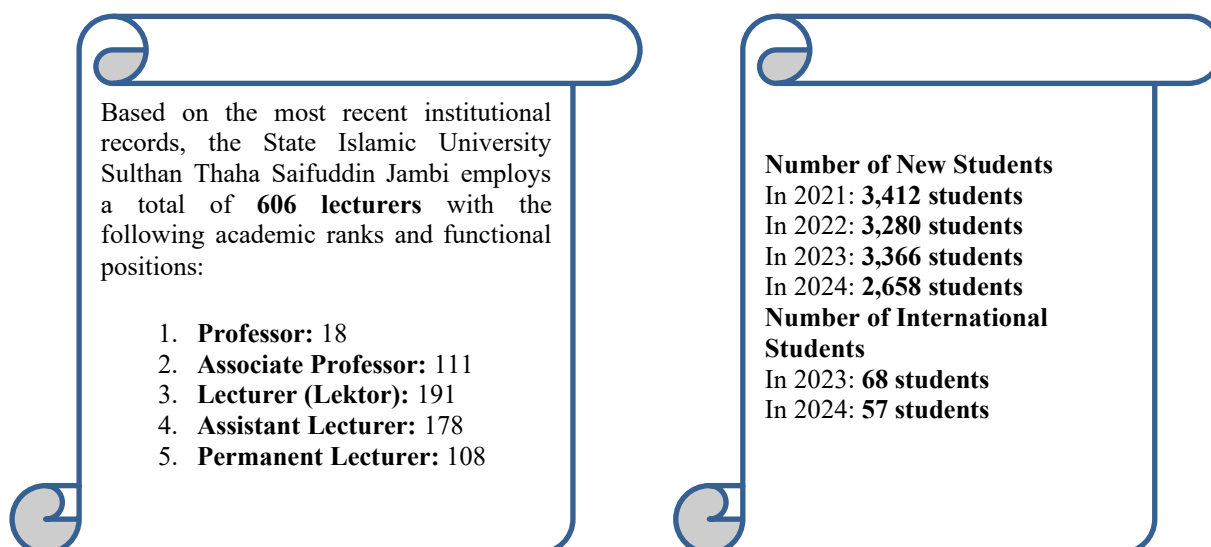


Figure 2. The distribution of lecturers by academic rank and the number of new and international students at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in 2024.

The data presented in the table above illustrate the number of lecturers currently teaching at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. As of 2024, the university employs 18 professors, representing approximately 3% of the total 606 lecturers. However, the number is expected to increase, with two additional professors to be appointed in 2025 and three others currently in the process of obtaining their professorial decrees. Ideally, there should be at least 47 professors, or one professor per study program. To achieve this target, the university has implemented several strategic initiatives, including scheduled and continuous coaching clinics, academic writing bootcamps for completing Scopus-indexed publications, funding support for Scopus-indexed articles, and regular training and mentoring programs on reputable journal publication for all lecturers. Moreover, the number of associate professors is projected to reach 235, marking an increase of 112%, or approximately five associate professors per study program, while the number of lecturers has reached 324 individuals.

Regarding student enrollment, the number of new students at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi has shown a declining trend over the past few years. Based on institutional data, student admissions peaked in 2021 with 3,412 new students, then declined to 3,280 in 2022, slightly rose to 3,366 in 2023, and dropped significantly to 2,658 in 2024. A similar downward trend occurred among international students, decreasing from 69 students in 2023 to 57 students in 2024.

Therefore, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi must intensify its efforts to attract more prospective students to pursue higher education at the university. Strategies that need to be implemented include integrating the New Student Admission promotion with community service programs (Kukerta), as well as conducting massive promotional campaigns through offline outreach, social media engagement, alumni networks, and collaboration with local influencers. To enhance international student recruitment, the university should expand its global partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with foreign universities, double-degree programs, international classes, and student exchange programs.

The strategies currently implemented by the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi to improve institutional quality have also served as a model for university leaders, particularly the rectors of private Islamic institutes and the heads of Islamic colleges under the supervision of Kopertais Region XII of Jambi Province. These initiatives have been adopted as best practices to strengthen academic quality and foster inclusivity across private Islamic higher education institutions in the region.

Condition of Academic Journals in 2024

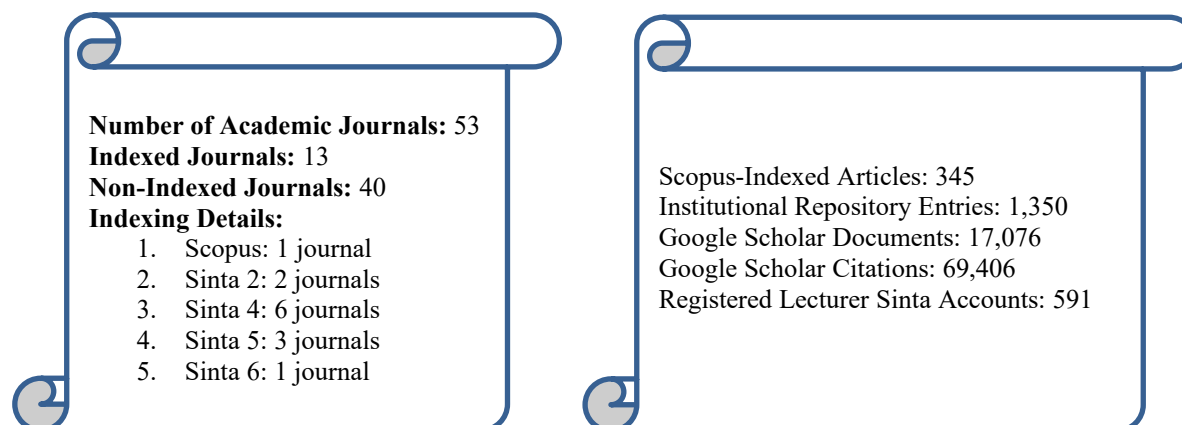


Figure 3. The condition of academic journals and research outputs at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in 2024

The table above presents detailed information on the number of indexed journals, Scopus articles, repositories, Google Scholar documentation, Google Scholar citations, and Sinta lecturer accounts within the environment of State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. Journals represent the scientific works of lecturers as part of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education, specifically in the field of research. Therefore, this research component serves as a beacon that should be followed by all lecturers teaching under Coordination of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Kopertais) Region XII of Jambi Province, especially those from Private Islamic College that are in the process of transforming their institutions into Private Islamic Institute.

Based on the researcher's observations of 18 Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions within Coordination of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Kopertais) Region XII, some have not yet changed their status or transformed into Private Islamic Institute. This indicates that efforts are still being made to determine the appropriate steps for such transformation in accordance with current developments and in reference to other Private Islamic Institutes that have already completed the process. Furthermore, Private

Islamic Institutes that have successfully transformed are also encouraged to improve their quality, particularly in one of the pillars of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education research conducted by lecturers.

Current Global Ranking Condition in 2024

Global ranking represents the collective efforts and aspirations of the university leadership and academic community to position the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi on an equal footing and in competition with other universities worldwide. According to documented data from the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, the university currently ranks 24th out of 25 universities in Indonesia, 103rd in Webometrics, and 205th in the UI GreenMetric ranking.

3.2. Factors Inhibiting Leaders in Improving the Quality of Inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education in Jambi Province

Based on documented data, there are 18 inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions under the supervision of the Coordination of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Kopertais) Region XII of Jambi Province, consisting of 12 Private Islamic Institutes (Institut Agama Islam Swasta), 4 Islamic Colleges of Education (Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah) namely *STIT Yapima Bungo*, *STIT YPI Kerinci*, *STIT Al-Falah Rimbo Bujang*, and *STIT Al-Azhar* and 2 Islamic Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam) *STAI Jari Nabi Tanjung Jabung Timur* and *STAI Mauizah Tanjung Barat*. The diversity of these 18 institutions becomes the responsibility of the Coordinator and Secretary of Kopertais Region XII to provide guidance, supervision, and to implement several strategies aimed at improving the nine quality standards of Private Islamic Higher Education.

According to the researcher's observations, there are several factors that hinder the Deputy Coordinator (Wakor) and Secretary General (Sekjen) of Kopertais Region XII in providing effective guidance and supervision. These inhibiting factors are classified into internal and external factors. Internal factors originate from within the leadership itself, such as a lack of motivation, particularly because leadership positions often change frequently within a short period before a term is completed. As a result, understanding the conditions of the Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions under the supervision of Kopertais Region XII of Jambi Province, which require consistent guidance and supervision, has not yet reached an optimal stage. In addition, limited time is also an inhibiting factor, as it restricts the ability to provide comprehensive services to all Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions.

External factors, on the other hand, come from outside influences, such as limited collaboration among Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions themselves, as well as with the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, local governments, and national authorities. As stated by one of the Vice Rectors of a Private Islamic Institute, identified as IW, every institution inevitably encounters external factors—especially concerning the process of transforming from a Private Islamic College (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Swasta) into a Private Islamic Institute (Institut Agama Islam Swasta). This transformation process requires continuous guidance from Kopertais Region XII of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, along with maintaining good relations regionally, nationally, and internationally. At present, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi has achieved an excellent status and serves as an academic model for other institutions.

Another statement from a Vice Rector of a Private Islamic Institute, identified as Nr, emphasized that the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi serves as a benchmark for Private Islamic Institutes to implement reforms in education and teaching, research, and community service. The transformation of the university into an excellent institution has been a long and challenging process—it could not be achieved overnight. The strategies adopted by the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi have become a model for leaders of Private Islamic Institutes and Private Islamic Colleges under Kopertais Region XII to emulate and apply. Nevertheless, it is acknowledged with gratitude that the transformation process, once only a hope, has now become a reality. Meanwhile, other Private Islamic Colleges that have not yet transformed are gradually working to meet the necessary requirements, despite various internal and external challenges.

Furthermore, a statement from the Head of one Private Islamic College (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Swasta), identified as RW, noted that institutional transformation efforts must always receive guidance and official approval from Kopertais Region XII of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi. Currently, the college is striving intensively to meet all the requirements for transformation, similar to other Private Islamic Institutes. However, several obstacles remain, particularly in terms of human resources, infrastructure, and program accreditation. Despite these challenges, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi continues to serve as a model for improving the quality of Private Islamic Higher Education, although certain aspects may not necessarily be replicated.

Based on the documentation, observations, and interviews described above, it can be concluded that numerous internal and external factors hinder leadership in providing consistent guidance and supervision to all Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Nonetheless, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi continues to serve as the leading model for institutional transformation and quality improvement in the Tri

Dharma of Islamic Higher Education—education, research, and community service. Martinis and Maisah [44], state that innovation and transformation are driven by humans through the adaptation of strategies, environmental demands, and various factors that characterize change itself, which also depend on specific time contexts.

3.3. Efforts Made by Leaders to Improve the Quality of Inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education in Jambi Province

In relation to education quality, it has become one of the key targets that must be achieved by all Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions, in line with government policies stated in Government Regulation No. 19 of 2025 concerning the National Education Standards, which include standards for content, graduation, process, educators and educational staff, facilities and infrastructure, management, financing, and assessment along with the Tri Dharma of Higher Education: education and teaching, research, and community service.

Based on the researcher's observations, several efforts have been made by the leaders and secretary of the Coordination of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Kopertais) Region XII of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi to improve the quality of inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions under its supervision in Jambi Province. These efforts include: 1) Providing guidance and supervision in administrative management through digitalization-based services; 2) motivating human resources to enhance academic qualifications, particularly encouraging master's degree (S2) holders to pursue doctoral studies (S3); and 3) improving facilities and infrastructure to comply with the standards stipulated in the National Education Standards Regulation, especially for Private Islamic Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam) seeking to transform their institutional status into Private Islamic Institutes (Institut Agama Islam Swasta).

The researcher's observations are supported by a statement from one of the heads of Private Islamic Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Swasta), identified as MS, who stated that, administratively, the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi serves as a model for improving the quality and transformation of inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions under Kopertais Region XII of Jambi Province. The university's strong accreditation status has become a source of pride for all affiliated Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions, although there remain visible issues related to strategic political positions that have yet to be fully resolved.

Another statement from a lecturer at a Private Islamic Institute (Institut Agama Islam Swasta), identified as HS, acknowledged that all Private Islamic Institutes and Private Islamic Colleges recognize the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi as a beacon of transformation in improving the quality of inclusive Islamic higher education under its supervision. Without consistent motivation, guidance, and supervision from Kopertais Region XII, efforts to improve the quality of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions would not progress smoothly. Therefore, continuous and structured mentoring and supervision from Kopertais Region XII are highly expected.

Furthermore, the rector of one Private Islamic Institute, identified as MW, stated that Kopertais Region XII has taken gradual steps to enhance quality through consistent guidance and supervision in the fields of education and teaching, research, and community service. This also includes efforts to promote digital transformation by conducting various training programs. However, it is also recognized that frequent changes in leadership at the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, often occurring before the end of the appointed term, have posed challenges to the continuity of mentoring for the inclusive Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions under its coordination.

Another statement from the head of a Private Islamic College (Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Swasta), also identified as MS, emphasized that the efforts made by Kopertais Region XII of the State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi in improving the quality of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions have been quite significant. These efforts include providing guidance in education and teaching, research, and community service, as well as training in the proper use of digital applications. In the current digital era, marked by constant change, education plays a crucial role in shaping the character of human resources capable of facing global challenges. Globalization not only brings *positive opportunities* such as comfort, convenience, affordability, beauty, and progress, but also *negative consequences*, including anxiety, suffering, and confusion. Globalization operates continuously, offering countless personal choices and freedoms creating a "flood of choices" and "opportunities," depending on one's ability to navigate them.

Based on the documentation, observations, and interviews presented above, it can be concluded that the efforts made by Kopertais Region XII as a beacon of transformation in improving the quality of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions include continuous supervision and guidance, both direct and indirect. However, challenges remain, such as the frequent rotation of university leadership, which requires time for both individuals and institutions to adapt effectively. According to Maisah, in the book *Manajemen Strategik dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam* [Strategic Management in the Perspective of Islamic Education], a leader is someone entrusted with the responsibility to lead an organization [45]. Therefore, those selected to lead Islamic Higher Education Institutions should be competent and meet the necessary qualifications for leadership positions. Furthermore,

Maisah et al., explains that Islamic Higher Education Institutions must continue to move forward with precision, adapting to various situations [46]. Continuous adaptation and transformation are essential to prepare for all possible outcomes whether progress or stagnation in pursuit of institutional excellence.

The findings of this study reinforce and extend previous research on leadership and institutional transformation within Islamic higher education. The institutional progress achieved by State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi particularly in accreditation improvement, the establishment of new faculties, and the strengthening of research performance demonstrates how strategic leadership and collaborative institutional culture contribute to educational excellence. This aligns with Hefniy et al., who found that prophetic leadership grounded in Islamic values plays a pivotal role in shaping high-performing institutions [47]. Similarly, Muslimin, Giyoto, and Rohmadi emphasized that leadership engagement and participatory governance are essential for sustainable transformation, although cultural and structural barriers often impede progress [48]. The present study also supports Supratman et al., who identified organizational restructuring and digital-based management as key enablers of institutional quality enhancement in private Islamic universities [49]. Moreover, the mentoring and quality assurance initiatives observed in this study correspond with Firmansah [50], findings that performance evaluation and continuous professional development strengthen institutional accountability. The strategic adaptability shown by the leadership of State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi thus complements previous evidence and provides a concrete model of inclusive and transformative leadership within Indonesia's Islamic higher education context.

This study provides a comprehensive and contextualized analysis of how UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi serves as a pioneering model for developing inclusive private Islamic higher education institutions in Jambi Province. The novelty lies in integrating institutional transformation, leadership effectiveness, and digital-based administrative management within the framework of Kopertais Region XII's supervision. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on accreditation or leadership challenges, this research uniquely reveals how institutional excellence, academic quality improvement, and digital transformation can be synergized to create a sustainable model for inclusive Islamic higher education.

The findings imply that the transformation of UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi can serve as a strategic reference for policymakers, Islamic higher education leaders, and Kopertais administrators in enhancing institutional quality and inclusivity. Strengthening leadership capacity, fostering academic collaboration, and implementing digital-based governance are crucial to ensuring consistent quality improvement. Moreover, this research highlights the importance of structured mentoring systems to assist private Islamic higher education institutions in achieving the standards set by the National Education Standards Regulation and preparing for global academic competitiveness. This research is limited to descriptive analysis based on documentation, observation, and interviews within the context of Kopertais Region XII Jambi Province.

4. CONCLUSION

The State Islamic University Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi serves as a model for transformation among Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions under the supervision of Kopertais Region XII of Jambi Province. However, in certain areas, there are aspects that cannot be fully adopted as a benchmark in implementing quality improvement within Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions. In addition, several inhibiting factors still need to be addressed to enhance quality development, particularly in the fields of education and teaching as well as community service. Nevertheless, several efforts have been undertaken, such as strengthening continuous guidance and supervision, both directly and indirectly. Further research is recommended to quantitatively analyze the effectiveness of the Kopertais Region XII coaching and supervision model on improving the academic and institutional quality of Private Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions in various provinces in Indonesia.

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