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## Managing global partnerships for quality improvement in higher education: A case study from Indonesia

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### Abstract

This research investigates how an Islamic state university in Indonesia organizes and sustains international partnerships as part of its quality improvement agenda. The case focuses on Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, a relatively young institution that recently earned national excellence accreditation. Using a qualitative single-case study, data were collected from in-depth interviews with senior academic leaders and faculty members directly involved in international activities, as well as a review of official strategic documents and partnership records. Thematic analysis supported by NVivo software was employed to identify recurring patterns and critical insights. The study reveals four primary forms of collaboration—joint research projects, academic mobility, co-authored publications, and emerging dual degree initiatives—which have contributed to curriculum enhancement, increased research visibility, and strengthened accreditation outcomes. These partnerships are not merely symbolic but are embedded in the university's strategic plan, reflecting a deliberate shift toward measurable results. Nonetheless, challenges such as limited staff capacity, coordination gaps, and fluctuating funding remain significant constraints. The findings contribute to the literature by providing a rare, context-specific account of strategic internationalization in a faith-based university within the Global South. The study offers practical guidance for higher education leaders seeking to align global engagement with institutional missions, while also inviting comparative research to explore similar models in other underrepresented academic contexts.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** This study received approval from the Ethical Committee of Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram, Indonesia (Approval No. 2052, dated 2 January 2025). All participants provided informed consent, and their data were anonymised to protect confidentiality.

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## 1. Introduction

Internationalization has marked a substantial trend across worldwide educational institutions during the last twenty years because of the competitive academic environment as well as the requirements of modern knowledge-based societies and the necessity to enhance quality standards [1, 2]. Educational institutions worldwide actively pursue cultural and academic exchange through collaborative research projects and student mobility programs and dual degree offerings and institutional alliances to develop better academic standards and promote innovative practices and boost their international presence [3]. The expanding educational trend knows no geographical limits. Academic organizations within the Global South, especially in Asia and the Middle East, are increasingly leveraging international partnerships to advance their quality control objectives alongside their strategic development initiatives [4]. The Indonesian educational sector shows significant growth in internationalization among state Islamic universities specifically *Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri* (PTKIN) which focus on connecting religious teachings with contemporary academic approaches [5].

Among these institutions, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Mataram presents an intriguing case. As a relatively young university situated in a peripheral region of Indonesia, UIN Mataram has strategically embraced international collaboration as a pathway to institutional development. The university's recent achievement of "Akreditasi Unggul" from the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) in 2024 underscores its commitment to quality and signals the effectiveness of its international engagement. Despite these achievements, the literature on how Islamic higher education institutions manage international partnerships—especially from a strategic and managerial lens—remains limited. Most studies on internationalization in Islamic universities have focused on theological adaptations [6] intercultural curricula [7] or the challenges of global branding [8] without examining the internal governance, planning, and strategic management of such initiatives. Furthermore, while some research has addressed the benefits of cross-border collaborations in Indonesian universities generally [9] there is a lack of detailed case studies that explore how these collaborations are designed, implemented, and assessed within PTKIN institutions.

This study addresses that gap by investigating the strategic management of international collaborations at UIN Mataram and how such efforts contribute to academic quality. Drawing on a case study methodology, the research explores not only the types of international partnerships the university has pursued—ranging from academic exchange to joint publications—but also how these initiatives are embedded within its institutional development strategy. By examining internal policy documents, collaborative frameworks, and stakeholder experiences, this paper provides insights into the mechanisms and challenges of managing internationalization within a faith-based higher education context. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on quality assurance, institutional strategy, and international partnership governance in Islamic higher education—a sector often overlooked in mainstream global education studies.

This study makes three distinct contributions to the literature on higher education management and internationalization. First, it addresses a notable research gap by examining the strategic management of global partnerships in Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN), a topic that remains largely underexplored in both Indonesian and international scholarship. Second, it offers a contextually grounded conceptual model for partnership governance in the Global South, where resource constraints and cultural considerations intersect with aspirations for global academic engagement. Third, it applies and integrates Knight's internationalization process model with Bryson and Crosby's public strategy framework in a faith-based higher education setting, demonstrating how these theoretical perspectives can be operationalized in an Islamic university context. Together, these contributions extend the discourse beyond descriptive accounts of internationalization by providing a strategic, institutionally embedded perspective that is relevant to policymakers, academic leaders, and scholars working in comparable environments.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Mataram strategically plan and manage its international collaborations?
2. What organizational structures and leadership approaches support the implementation of these collaborations?
3. Through what mechanisms are international partnerships executed, and how do these differ from symbolic or ceremonial agreements?
4. What measurable impacts have these partnerships produced on academic quality, curriculum development, and institutional accreditation?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Internationalization and Strategic Management in Higher Education**

The conversation surrounding internationalization in higher education has progressed well beyond its early focus on student mobility and cultural exchange, moving toward more structured, policy-oriented, and strategically managed forms of engagement [3]. In its contemporary form, internationalization encompasses the deliberate coordination of cross-border partnerships, collaborative research projects, curriculum harmonization, and the cultivation of global institutional reputation [10]. Increasingly, universities perceive such collaboration not only as a means of academic enrichment but also as a vital instrument for ensuring quality standards and enhancing competitiveness [11].

From a strategic management perspective, particularly in the higher education sector, success depends on aligning institutional objectives with external partnerships and internal capacities in a planned and coordinated manner [12]. Mintzberg's framework adds that effective strategic action in complex institutions must remain flexible, adapting to both global and local conditions [13]. For Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri (PTKIN), this adaptability is critical, given their unique position at the intersection of global academic currents and faith-based educational mandates. Decision-making in such contexts frequently involves weighing opportunities for international collaboration against the imperatives of religious values, national policy frameworks, and community expectations. Mintzberg's perspective thus offers more than a general principle—it provides a practical lens for understanding how PTKIN negotiate the integration of global engagement within their institutional strategies.

In the realm of Islamic higher education more broadly, embedding internationalization into strategic planning presents an added layer of complexity. It entails aligning global academic developments with the preservation of religious identity, national culture, and regulatory compliance [6]. The emerging notion of "Islamic internationalization" captures how Islamic universities engage in the global academic arena while remaining anchored to faith-based philosophical foundations [14]. Meeting this dual mandate demands governance models that are not only operationally effective but also capable of safeguarding epistemological integrity [15].

### **2.2. Empirical Studies on International Collaboration in Islamic Universities**

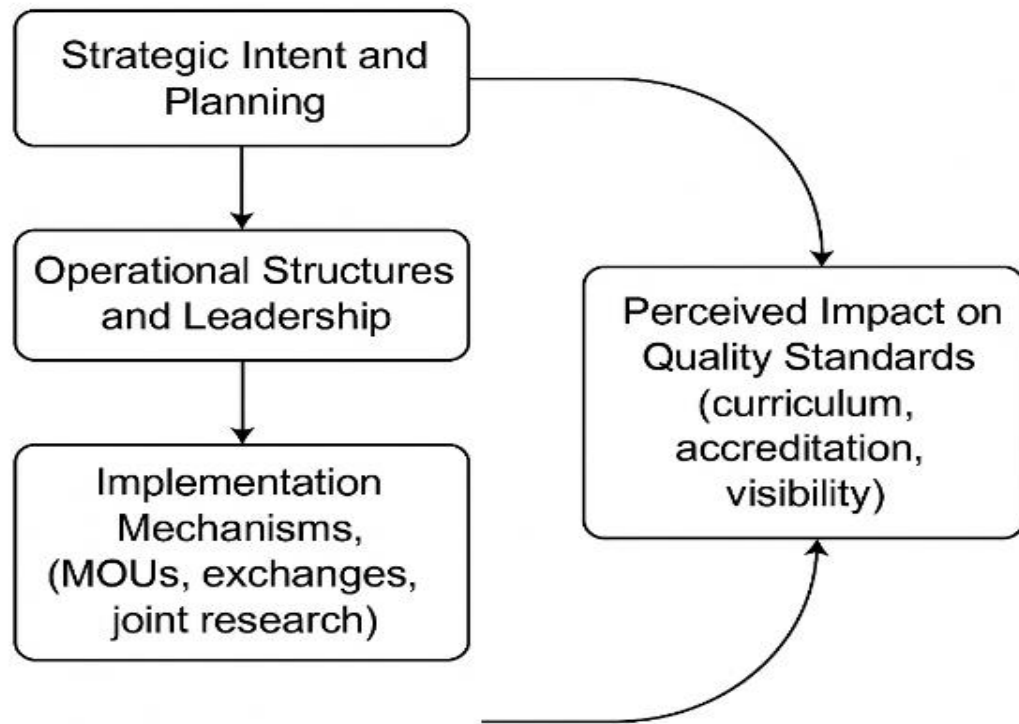
A growing body of scholarship has examined international collaboration in Southeast Asian Islamic universities, revealing a wide range of practices and impacts. Mok and Han [4] for example, observed that Malaysian Islamic universities have strengthened their curricula and research quality by forming partnerships with both Middle Eastern and Western institutions. In contrast, Saefullah and Fikri [8] explored the branding approaches of Indonesian Islamic universities, concluding that such collaborations often function more as symbolic capital—used to attract students and donors—than as fully embedded academic mechanisms.

Within Indonesia, Yusof and Mustaffa [9] reported that cross-border collaborations remain underdeveloped, constrained by regulatory inconsistencies and the absence of robust strategic planning. Similarly, Akhmadi [5] underscored the role of moderation and pluralism in shaping PTKIN's international policies, although his work did not address the operational frameworks needed for implementation. Much of the existing research has concentrated on tangible outcomes—such as higher publication counts or increased student exchanges—while relatively little attention has been paid to the strategic planning processes and institutional governance structures that underpin these partnerships [1].

### **2.3. Gaps and Conceptual Framework**

Despite the growing body of literature, there remains a notable gap in understanding how Islamic higher education institutions manage internationalization from a strategic perspective. Studies have yet to explore the internal processes, decision-making structures, and administrative models that support sustained and effective global partnerships, particularly in medium-sized Islamic universities outside Java.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating the case of UIN Mataram, an institution that has gained national accreditation recognition while actively developing international collaborations. It draws on a modified framework combining [3] internationalization process model and Bryson and Crosby [12] public strategy framework. The conceptual model (see Figure 1) comprises four dimensions: (1) strategic intent and planning, (2) operational structures and leadership, (3) implementation mechanisms (e.g., MoUs, exchanges, joint research), and (4) perceived impact on quality standards (curriculum, accreditation, visibility).



**Figure 1.**  
Conceptual Framework for Strategic Management of International Collaboration at UIN Mataram.

By examining these dimensions in the specific context of UIN Mataram, this study provides insight into the practices, constraints, and institutional thinking behind international engagement in Islamic higher education. The findings will contribute both theoretically and practically to the discourse on higher education management in the Global South.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative, single-site case study design Yin [16] to examine how a faith-based public university in Indonesia strategically manages international collaborations as part of its institutional quality improvement agenda. This case was chosen because of its nationally acknowledged accreditation status and its active involvement in international partnerships, positioning it as both theoretically significant and rich in insights [17] for examining strategic internationalization within higher education contexts that remain underrepresented.

#### 3.2. Participants and Data Sources

Using a purposive sampling approach Creswell [18] five key informants were selected for their direct engagement in shaping the university's internationalization agenda. While the number of participants was relatively small, each was chosen for their strategic position and insider knowledge—attributes that are particularly valuable in exploratory case studies at the institutional level. The focus was not on representativeness but on depth and relevance of insight. They were:

1. The Head of the Office of International Affairs (OIA)
2. A vice rector (for academic affairs)
3. Three faculty members are actively involved in joint research and exchange programs

In addition to interviews, institutional documents were collected, including Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs), international partnership reports, accreditation dossiers, and internal strategic planning documents.

#### 3.3. Instruments

The semi-structured interview protocol was piloted with two external experts to ensure clarity and thematic alignment. To strengthen trustworthiness, member checks were conducted with selected participants following transcription, and an audit trail of analytical decisions was maintained throughout the coding process.

#### 3.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection took place over a three-month period between January and March 2025. Interviews were conducted in person and via secure video calls, depending on participant availability. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Document collection was carried out through formal requests to the International Office and Planning Bureau, ensuring access to official, updated records. Field notes were also maintained to capture contextual insights during interviews and document review sessions.

### 3.5. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke [19] six-phase model: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and writing up. Both interview transcripts and documents were coded using NVivo software to ensure systematic analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows researchers to identify recurring patterns across qualitative data while remaining flexible to context-specific nuances [19]. Unlike content analysis, which focuses primarily on frequency counts, thematic analysis emphasizes meaning-making and interpretation, making it especially suitable for exploring strategic processes within institutions. The use of NVivo 14 software further ensured transparency and consistency in coding by enabling systematic data management and visualization.

This approach differs from many earlier studies on internationalization in Islamic universities, which have largely focused on descriptive outcomes such as the number of publications, mobility figures, or general benefits of collaboration [8, 9]. In contrast, the present study applies thematic analysis not only to interview transcripts but also to official documents such as MoUs, strategic plans, and accreditation reports. This integration of multiple data sources allows for a deeper understanding of how international partnerships are embedded in institutional governance and strategic planning, thereby offering a more comprehensive picture than outcome-based studies.

Codes were developed inductively, then grouped into broader categories reflecting the four core dimensions of the conceptual framework: planning, leadership, implementation, and quality outcomes. Cross-case synthesis was also employed to identify patterns and variances across different departments and stakeholders.

To establish organized and thorough analysis methods, the research team employed NVivo 14 software to classify and manage interview and institutional document data. Initial coding activities produced 178 codes, which were then distributed into four key conceptual framework categories: Strategic Intent and Planning, Operational Structures and Leadership, Implementation Mechanisms, and Quality Outcomes (see Table 1).

**Table 1.**  
Node Frequency of Themes in NVivo Coding

Thematic Node	Frequency of References	Number of Sources Coded
Strategic Intent and Planning	46	7
Operational Structures and Leadership	39	6
Implementation Mechanisms	53	8
Quality Outcomes	40	6

The distribution of institutional strategic focus across key areas appears in Table 1. The institutions demonstrated intense activity and reporting for implementation-related subjects, which became the most frequently cited themes. Through the matrix coding function in NVivo, the analysis examined theme co-occurrences. The statements made by the Head of OIA, together with the Vice Rector, demonstrated Leadership Structures and Strategic Intent as highly interconnected areas demonstrating that upper management directly shapes strategic goals.



**Figure 2.**  
Thematic Map Generated via NVivo Query Visualization.

Figure 2 illustrates the integration of strategic planning with operational processes, emphasizing how leadership and mechanisms converge to yield tangible quality outcomes.

### 3.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at UIN Mataram. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection, and confidentiality was assured through anonymization of names and roles. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored in encrypted files accessible only to the research team. All reporting adheres to ethical standards in qualitative research, including transparency, respect for participants, and institutional accountability [20].

## 4. Findings

The analysis of this case study revealed not only the structural organization of international partnerships within the university but also how such partnerships are embedded in institutional strategy. Rather than treating global engagement as symbolic or performative, the university adopts a results-oriented approach, emphasizing measurable academic outcomes. The findings are categorized into four key strategic dimensions: planning intent, leadership structures, implementation mechanisms, and impact on academic quality—each of which provides insight into how faith-oriented universities in emerging contexts operationalize internationalization with limited resources yet high aspirations.

### 4.1. Strategic Intent and Planning

At UIN Mataram, international engagement is firmly rooted in the institution's mid-term strategic plan (Renstra), which clearly articulates its vision of becoming a globally recognized Islamic university. As the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs (AF) explained, collaboration is not pursued merely for visibility; it is woven into the university's five-year development agenda. The Office of International Affairs (OIA) serves as the key driver in identifying suitable partners and ensuring that joint initiatives align with institutional academic priorities. Review of strategic documents also indicates a growing shift toward partnerships defined by concrete outcomes rather than nominal or ceremonial affiliations. The OIA Head (IR) emphasized that "in recent years, we shifted from ceremonial MoUs to measurable MoAs with clear academic outputs, especially in research and mobility." This reflects a more deliberate and performance-oriented approach to internationalization, consistent with strategic management theory [12].

### 4.2. Operational Structures and Leadership

The leadership structure at UIN Mataram supports internationalization through a distributed coordination model. The OIA acts as the central liaison but works closely with faculty-level coordinators to ensure implementation relevance. Faculty members confirmed that the coordination is not top-down but negotiated. "In my case," said SH, a senior faculty member, "we propose initiatives directly to the OIA, and they help us connect with foreign institutions."

However, the OIA faces challenges in staffing and cross-departmental integration. Documents show that internationalization responsibilities are still heavily centralized in the OIA, with limited support at the faculty administration level. This sometimes leads to delays in execution and unclear lines of accountability. As IR noted, "We need clearer internal SOPs across units to support fast, collaborative responses."

### 4.3. Implementation Mechanisms

Implementation practices at UIN Mataram include a range of formal and informal mechanisms. From 2021–2024, the university signed over 30 MoUs and 12 operational MoAs with institutions in Malaysia, Thailand, Germany, and Turkey. These cover joint research, guest lectures, visiting professorships, and exchange programs. One of the most successful initiatives cited by faculty was a collaborative research grant with a partner university in Malaysia. "We co-authored papers, hosted joint seminars, and even involved students in data collection," said AIM. SH added, "Some of our students now have the opportunity to present their work in ASEAN conferences, which was rare before." Table 2 summarizes the types and frequency of collaborative activities recorded over the past three academic years.

**Table 2.**  
Summary of UIN Mataram's International Collaboration Activities (2021–2024).

Type of Collaboration	Number of Activities	Key Partners
Joint Research Projects	7	Malaysia, Turkey
Staff Mobility	10	Germany, Thailand, Malaysia
Student Exchange	8	Malaysia, Brunei
Joint Seminars & Conferences	5	Online and in-person
Dual Degree Negotiations	2 (in progress)	Thailand

Source: OIA Annual Reports (2021–2024).

### 4.4. Perceived Impact on Academic Quality

All five participants acknowledged positive outcomes of international collaboration on academic visibility, teaching enrichment, and institutional reputation. IR noted that collaborative research outputs have increased, some being published in Scopus-indexed journals. Faculty also reported significant improvements in curriculum design. "We revise our syllabi based on our exposure to international workshops and co-teaching experiences," said MA. From an institutional

perspective, the internationalization efforts have contributed to the university's success in attaining "Akreditasi Unggul" from BAN-PT. AF explained, "The assessors explicitly noted our global outreach efforts in their evaluation. It became one of our unique strengths."

Even so, participants pointed out several aspects that require further attention, such as the limited English proficiency of administrative personnel, misalignments in academic calendars that create bureaucratic delays, and inconsistent funding for mobility initiatives. Nevertheless, across all interviews, there was a shared conviction that collaborative programs should not only be maintained but also formally embedded within the institution's long-term framework.

## **5. Discussion**

This research illustrates that international partnerships, when anchored in a clear institutional strategy rather than driven by external pressures or symbolic gestures, can play a substantive role in advancing institutional growth—particularly within higher education systems that are often underrepresented. Although internationalization is frequently linked to elite or Western universities, the findings here show how institutions in peripheral regions of the Global South are developing partnership models that are both rooted in local contexts and relevant to global academic discourse. By aligning collaborative initiatives with long-term institutional objectives, universities can achieve upward quality progression while safeguarding their core identity—an imperative that is especially significant for faith-based institutions seeking to engage with global academic standards without losing their foundational values.

### *5.1. Strategic Internationalization as Intentional Institutional Action*

One of the clearest messages emerging from this study is that UIN Mataram's global engagement is not accidental. It is embedded in the university's Renstra, and the associated targets are not peripheral to its mission but central to its vision of academic excellence. This finding echoes Knight [3] and Qiang [11] observation that internationalization has shifted from being an add-on activity to becoming a planned, institution-wide process. In UIN Mataram's case, this shift is visible in the move from ceremonial MoUs toward MoAs with specific deliverables—joint publications, curriculum co-design, or staff mobility—signalling a more results-oriented culture.

This is not common across all PTKIN. Earlier models often saw global partnerships as symbolic, intended more for visibility than for measurable academic gains [1]. UIN Mataram's approach represents a departure from this pattern and demonstrates what Zamani and Esfijani [15] described as "faith-informed strategic alignment." Here, partnerships are valued not only for their academic contribution but also for how they can enrich Islamic educational values—through, for example, exposure to diverse perspectives that align with Islamic principles of knowledge-seeking and mutual respect.

A useful comparison can be drawn with the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), which also integrates international engagement into its strategic plan but operates within a better-funded and more globally recognised environment [4]. While IIUM uses its global network to enhance its branding, UIN Mataram's focus is more on tangible academic outputs, given its leaner resources. This distinction shows that strategic intent is not simply a matter of adopting a global vision—it is about aligning that vision with the realities of institutional capacity.

From a theoretical lens, Mintzberg's idea of emergent strategy [13] is also relevant. UIN Mataram's willingness to adapt plans—such as shifting in-person exchanges to virtual formats during the pandemic—shows that strategic intent and flexibility can co-exist. This capacity to adjust while keeping the long-term goal intact is often what allows institutions in unpredictable environments to sustain progress.

### *5.2. Leadership and Organizational Coordination: Beyond Administrative Formalities*

The second insight relates to leadership and coordination. UIN Mataram's internationalization is anchored in the OIA, yet the findings indicate that individual faculties and even specific lecturers also take an active role in identifying and pursuing partnerships. This shared ownership reflects a decentralised approach that scholars like [4] have linked to more responsive and adaptable internationalization efforts.

Nevertheless, there are gaps in how the system operates. Decision-making authority is still concentrated in the OIA, which can lead to delays and unclear lines of responsibility. Experience from other universities shows that even with committed leaders, partnerships can falter if supporting structures are weak. In UIN Mataram's case, this means that challenges such as limited staffing and misaligned faculty-central office timelines must be addressed. As Bryson and Crosby [12] points out, a strategy, no matter how well-intentioned, risks stalling when there is no parallel investment in the structures that will sustain it. The evidence here reinforces that managing internationalization is not simply about leadership vision; it also requires strong mechanisms for accountability across units and well-integrated operational systems.

The experience of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) offers an instructive contrast. Ismail, et al. [21] describes how USIM's faculty-level international coordinators have the authority to make certain operational decisions independently, reducing bottlenecks while still aligning with the central plan.

Beyond the Islamic higher education context, research on distributed leadership shows similar patterns. Lin [22] found that when authority is shared across layers of leadership, innovation and collaboration tend to increase. In smaller Catholic universities in Latin America, for example, Ramacciotti [23] observed that localised decision-making helped ensure that global collaborations were both culturally appropriate and operationally feasible. For UIN Mataram, moving toward a clearer, shared leadership framework—supported by SOPs across faculties—could address current inefficiencies and strengthen the ownership of partnerships at multiple levels.



### *5.3. Implementation Mechanisms and the Shift Toward Academic Substance*

The forms of international engagement—such as joint research projects, faculty exchanges, and student mobility—closely resemble global trends documented by De Wit, et al. [10]. What distinguishes UIN Mataram, however, is its increasing focus on tangible collaborative outcomes rather than symbolic or ceremonial agreements. Insights from faculty members indicate that activities like co-authored publications, joint curriculum development, and shared participation in academic conferences have taken on greater importance. This shift reflects a movement away from viewing internationalization primarily as institutional branding [8] toward understanding it as a process of jointly producing knowledge. It also affirms the argument of Rohmah, et al. [7] that intercultural competence and curriculum innovation serve as more meaningful measures of global engagement within Islamic higher education.

The importance of aligning leadership vision with institutional capacity in driving international collaboration echoes broader organizational research. Santoso, et al. [24] for instance, found that managerial capabilities, an adhocracy-oriented culture, and effective knowledge-sharing practices significantly enhance an organization's capacity for innovation and overall performance. While their context differs from higher education, the underlying mechanisms—flexible structures, empowered leadership, and collaborative knowledge creation—are directly relevant to how PTKIN can strengthen their internationalization efforts. Similarly, Mpofu and Sauti [25] highlight that successful internationalization, even in the small and medium enterprise sector, depends on strategic alignment between internal competencies and external partnership strategies, coupled with the ability to navigate market-specific challenges. When applied to the PTKIN context, these insights reinforce the idea that sustained global engagement requires not only formal agreements but also the cultivation of adaptive institutional cultures, cross-unit coordination, and targeted capacity building to address both anticipated and emergent challenges in a faith-based educational environment.

### *5.4. Impacts on Quality and Institutional Identity*

One of the most notable outcomes of the university's internationalization agenda is its tangible impact on quality benchmarks. The recent achievement of an Akreditasi Unggul status from BAN-PT can be linked, in part, to the institution's active participation in cross-border academic initiatives. This outcome reflects [1] view that meaningful global engagement strengthens both institutional standards and public credibility.

Yet, the case of UIN Mataram also reveals a distinctive challenge: sustaining a balance between outward-looking integration and the preservation of local character. While actively building academic partnerships with universities in Asia and Europe, the institution continues to ground its development in Islamic principles and the priorities of the national education system. This interplay, which Akhmadi [5] refers to as “moderate pluralism,” positions UIN Mataram within the evolving discourse on “Islamic internationalization” [6] where global ambitions are framed and guided by faith-informed values.

The tension between embracing global practices and safeguarding institutional identity is a recurring theme among faith-based universities worldwide. Studies on Catholic universities, for example, show that these institutions often adopt what can be described as “contextual internationalization,” selectively integrating global academic practices while preserving core religious and cultural values [23]. PTKIN's experience reflects a similar pathway, using international collaborations to introduce pedagogical and research innovations while reinforcing its Islamic educational mission. This dual approach positions PTKIN to offer a distinctive contribution to the global higher education landscape—one that demonstrates how mission-driven institutions can act as both guardians of tradition and active participants in shaping globally relevant knowledge systems.

Overall, the results align with wider patterns in global higher education, where the effectiveness of governance plays a more decisive role in shaping successful partnerships than the mere availability of resources. In an environment where international collaboration is becoming both more competitive and more focused on measurable outcomes, institutions that combine a well-defined strategic vision with responsive leadership—irrespective of location or religious background—are in a stronger position to cultivate impactful global ties. The present case adds nuance to current discussions on the diversification of knowledge creation worldwide and highlights the growing visibility of internationalization models emerging from the Global South.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study examined how Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Mataram integrates international collaboration into its broader strategy for improving academic quality. The findings show that internationalization is not treated as a symbolic effort but is embedded in long-term institutional planning. Through structured leadership, diverse implementation mechanisms, and outcome-driven collaborations, the university has strengthened its curriculum, enhanced research visibility, and achieved national accreditation excellence. These results underline that faith-based universities in emerging contexts can engage in global partnerships while maintaining their institutional identity.

### *6.1. Implications*

The study contributes both theoretically and practically to the discussion on internationalization in higher education. For institutional leaders, the findings demonstrate the importance of shifting from ceremonial agreements to partnerships that produce measurable academic outputs. Strengthening coordination between central offices and faculties, investing in staff capacity, and ensuring sustainable funding are also shown to be critical for success. Policymakers, meanwhile, are reminded that supportive regulations and leadership training programs can help create a more enabling environment for internationally engaged universities.



## 6.2. Limitations

Like most case studies, this research has boundaries. It is based on a single institution and relies primarily on the perspectives of leaders and faculty members. The absence of student and partner-institution voices means that some dimensions of international collaboration are not fully captured. In addition, the study covers a relatively short period of institutional development, limiting its ability to assess long-term impacts.

## 6.3. Future Research

Further research could extend the scope by comparing several Islamic universities across different regions, or by including non-Islamic institutions in the Global South for cross-case analysis. Incorporating student experiences and partner perspectives would also provide a more comprehensive picture of how collaborations function in practice. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable in tracking how partnerships influence accreditation outcomes, faculty development, and curriculum reform over time.

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