

# Challenges and Opportunities in The Internationalization of Islamic Higher Education

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## Abstract:

The internationalization of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) remains understudied despite its growing significance in global higher education. While mainstream institutions have been extensively researched, IHEIs face unique challenges due to their religious identity, mission, and distinct stakeholder expectations. This study addresses this gap by analyzing IHEIs' internationalization efforts through Resource Dependence Theory (RDT), which posits that organizations strategize to secure critical external resources. This research utilizes a qualitative multiple-case study design to examine four diverse IHEIs through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The findings reveal that IHEIs pursue internationalization to access funding, students, faculty expertise, and legitimacy while managing dependencies specific to their. Key strategies include diversifying partnerships, negotiation with accreditors, and adaptation to global standards. Challenges include financial constraints, geopolitical instability, and tensions between Islamic values and secular academic norms. Conversely, opportunities arise from niche student markets, Islamic funding networks, and global collaborations. The study concludes that IHEIs proactively manage dependencies to enhance autonomy and sustainability. By applying RDT, this research provides insights into how IHEIs navigate global higher education dynamics while preserving their religious mission, offering valuable implications for policymakers and institutional leaders.

**Keywords:** *Internationalization, Islamic Higher Education Institutions, Teori Ketergantungan Sumber Daya*

## Abstrak:

Internasionalisasi Perguruan Tinggi Islam (PTKI) masih kurang diteliti meskipun perannya semakin penting dalam pendidikan tinggi global. Berbeda dengan institusi arus utama yang telah banyak dikaji, PTKI menghadapi tantangan khas yang berkaitan dengan identitas keagamaan, misi, dan ekspektasi pemangku kepentingan yang berbeda. Studi ini mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan menganalisis upaya internasionalisasi PTKI menggunakan *Resource Dependence Theory* (RDT), yang menyatakan bahwa organisasi menyusun strategi untuk memperoleh sumber daya eksternal penting. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus ganda kualitatif, mencakup empat PTKI yang beragam melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan analisis dokumen. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa PTKI mengejar internasionalisasi guna memperoleh pendanaan, mahasiswa, keahlian dosen, dan legitimasi, sambil menyeimbangkan ketergantungan yang terkait dengan identitas Islam. Strategi utama meliputi diversifikasi kemitraan, negosiasi dengan lembaga akreditasi, dan adaptasi terhadap standar global. Tantangan yang dihadapi meliputi keterbatasan finansial, ketidakstabilan geopolitik, serta ketegangan antara nilai Islam dan norma akademik sekuler. Namun, peluang juga muncul melalui pasar mahasiswa khusus, jaringan pendanaan Islam, dan kolaborasi global. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa PTKI secara aktif mengelola ketergantungan untuk meningkatkan otonomi dan keberlanjutan kelembagaan.

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## Introduction

The internationalization of higher education has become a global imperative, driven by globalization, economic pressures, and the pursuit of academic excellence (Caliskan & Oldac, 2025). While mainstream universities have been extensively studied, Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) remain underexplored despite their unique challenges and contributions (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024). IHEIs operate within dual frameworks – religious identity and global academic standards – creating distinct dependencies on resources such as Islamic funding bodies, international accreditation, and student recruitment (Iskarim et al., 2025). For instance, geopolitical tensions and competition with secular universities further complicate their internationalization efforts (Sibawaihi et al., 2024). This study addresses these gaps by examining how IHEIs navigate these complexities through Resource Dependence Theory (RDT).

Previous research on higher education internationalization has predominantly focused on Western and secular institutions, overlooking the unique contexts of IHEIs (Fuadi et al., 2025). While studies highlight the role of global rankings and funding in shaping international strategies, they often neglect religious identity as a factor (Lee & Mao, 2025). A few scholars have examined IHEIs, emphasizing their reliance on Islamic networks (Ambarwati & Sari, 2024), yet gaps remain in understanding how they manage secular accreditation demands. This study builds on existing work by applying RDT to analyze how IHEIs strategically acquire resources while maintaining their religious mission.

Despite growing interest in higher education internationalization, few studies examine how IHEIs navigate dependencies on both religious and secular resources (Alkaraan et al., 2024). Existing research either focuses on general internationalization trends (Chyrva et al., 2023) or Islamic education in isolation, failing to integrate both perspectives. For instance, while Akkerman et al., (2021) analyzes global competition, they overlook how IHEIs compete with limited resources. This study uniquely applies RDT to explore how IHEIs balance dual dependencies, offering insights into niche strategies for resource acquisition and legitimacy.

This study is crucial because IHEIs contribute significantly to global education yet face understudied challenges (Ndaipa et al., 2023). Understanding their strategies can help policymakers and institutions enhance international collaboration (Jones et al., 2021). Additionally, RDT provides a novel lens to examine how IHEIs mitigate resource constraints, offering practical solutions for sustainable growth. Given the rising demand for cross-cultural education, this research addresses the urgent need for inclusive internationalization models.

This study systematically examines the internationalization strategies of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) through the lens of Resource Dependence

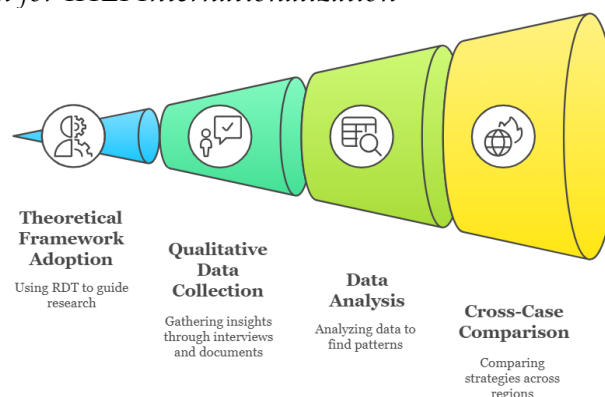
Theory (RDT) (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024). The primary objectives are threefold: (1) identifying key resources – such as funding, international students, faculty expertise, and institutional legitimacy – that IHEIs pursue through global engagement (de Wit & Altbach, 2021); (2) analyzing strategic approaches—including diversifying partnerships, negotiating with accrediting bodies, and adapting to secular academic standards—used to manage external dependencies (Huang et al., 2022); and (3) assessing challenges (e.g., geopolitical constraints, competition with secular universities) and opportunities (e.g., niche Islamic education markets, cross-border collaborations) in their internationalization efforts (Tight, 2022). Building on existing literature, this study hypothesizes that IHEIs with diversified international partnerships—across both Islamic and secular academic networks—demonstrate greater institutional resilience in mitigating financial and geopolitical risks (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024). Conversely, institutions that struggle to balance religious identity with global academic standards may face higher adaptation costs, potentially diluting their Islamic mission while seeking international legitimacy (Huang et al., 2022). These hypotheses will be examined through qualitative case studies, providing empirical insights into how IHEIs strategically navigate their unique dependencies in the global higher education landscape.

## Method

The study examined the internationalization of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs), a critical yet underexplored phenomenon in global higher education. While mainstream universities have been extensively studied, IHEIs face unique challenges due to their religious identity, mission-driven objectives, and distinct stakeholder expectations (Nasir & Rijal, 2021). This research gap necessitates an in-depth investigation into how IHEIs navigate global academic integration while maintaining their Islamic ethos. The study adopts Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) as a framework, emphasizing how institutions strategically secure essential resources such as funding, international students, and accreditation (Woldegiorgis, 2024). By examining these dynamics, the research contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of religious identity and globalization in higher education (S. Sibawaihi et al., 2024). The detailed research roadmap is presented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1**

*Research Process Funnel for IHEI Internationalization*



*Note.* The systematic research process, from topic identification to data analysis, is used to study IHEI internationalization

A qualitative multiple-case study approach was employed to capture the

complexities of IHEI internationalization across diverse contexts (Яремчук, 2023). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, and international office staff, along with supplementation by document analysis of institutional policies, strategic plans, and partnership agreements. This dual-method approach ensures triangulation, enhancing data validity and reliability (Schlunegger et al., 2024). Four IHEIs from different regions (Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Western countries) were selected to provide comparative insights into how varying dependencies shape internationalization strategies (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024). The qualitative design allows an in-depth exploration of institutional behaviors and environmental interactions, aligning with RDT's focus on organizational adaptation.

Data collection involved purposive sampling to select institutions actively engaged in internationalization, ensuring relevance and depth (Mezmir, 2020). Interviews were conducted both in-person and virtually, transcribed, and thematically analyzed using NVivo software to identify patterns in resource dependencies and strategic responses (Busetto et al., 2020). Document analysis followed a structured protocol to extract data on institutional goals, partnerships, and accreditation statuses (Salahudin et al., 2020). The analytical process was guided by RDT, with coding focused on key resources, external dependencies, and mitigation strategies (Kim & Adlof, 2024). Cross-case comparison highlighted variations in institutional approaches, offering nuanced insights into how IHEIs balance global integration with religious identity. Ethical considerations, including confidentiality and informed consent, were strictly adhered to throughout the study.

## Results and Discussion

### Result

#### Mapping the Resource Landscape: Critical Resources and Key Dependencies in IHEI Internationalization

Analysis across the four case study institutions consistently revealed that financial resources, international student enrollment, qualified faculty with international experience, and institutional legitimacy (Qiu, 2018) through global recognition and accreditation, constitute the most critical resources sought through internationalization. Interview data underscored that securing diverse funding streams, beyond often limited domestic sources, was a primary driver. Consistent with Resource Dependence Theory, the perceived need for these external resources shapes the strategic direction and operational focus of IHEI internationalization initiatives, driving engagement with the global environment to ensure institutional viability and growth.

The study identified key external dependencies common across the IHEIs, aligning with RDT predictions. These include significant reliance on foreign governments for scholarships and policy frameworks, international accreditation bodies for quality assurance and legitimacy, partner universities abroad for joint programs and research collaboration, and specific international student markets for recruitment. Document analysis confirmed formal agreements and strategic plans targeting these entities. Administrators frequently emphasized that effectively managing these dependencies is essential for navigating the complexities of the international higher education landscape and accessing vital resources.



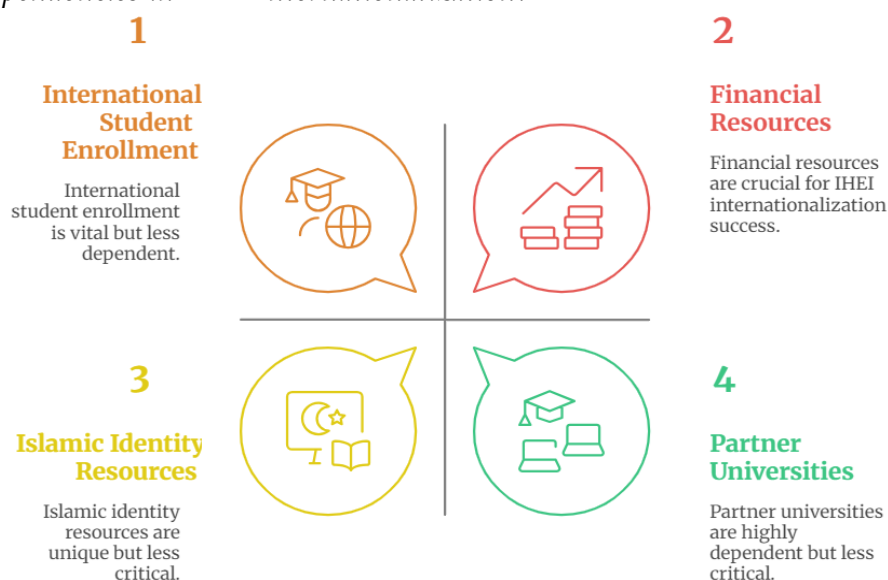
Beyond general academic resources, findings highlighted dependencies unique to the Islamic identity of the institutions (Sahin, 2018). These include reliance on funding from Islamic philanthropic organizations, accreditation or validation from recognized Islamic scholarly bodies, partnerships with universities within the Muslim world, and attracting students specifically seeking Islamic studies programs. Resource Dependence Theory frames this as managing a distinct set of dependencies crucial for maintaining institutional mission and identity while pursuing broader international academic integration, often creating complex balancing acts for administrators.

Stakeholders across the cases frequently reported perceptions of resource scarcity and environmental constraints impacting internationalization. Key challenges included limited access to sustainable international funding, intense global competition for students and faculty, geopolitical instability affecting partnerships in key regions (particularly the Middle East) and difficulties in aligning Islamic educational principles with secular international standards. These findings support RDT's assertion that external environmental factors and the availability of critical resources heavily constrain organizational autonomy and strategic choices for IHEIs.

The resource landscape for IHEI internationalization is characterized by interconnected dependencies. For instance, securing funding from certain international bodies often depended upon achieving specific accreditation standards or establishing partnerships with Western universities, demonstrating linked resource needs. Similarly, attracting international students relied on institutional reputation, which in turn relied on international research collaborations and faculty profiles. RDT provides a valuable framework for understanding how this complex web of interdependent resources shapes the strategic actions of IHEIs. The detailed resource dependencies are shown in figure 2 below:

**Figure 2**

*Resource Dependencies in IHEI Internationalization.*



*Note.* The various external resource dependencies faced by IHEIs in internationalization, including funding, students, legitimacy, and networks

### **Navigating the External Environment: Strategies Employed by IHEIs to Manage Resource Dependencies**

Consistent with Resource Dependence Theory, IHEIs actively employed

diversification strategies to manage external dependencies (Jaafar et al., 2023). Interviewees detailed efforts to cultivate a wide range of international partnerships for student exchange, research collaboration, and joint degree programs. Document analysis corroborated this, revealing numerous Memoranda of Understanding with institutions worldwide. This strategy aimed to reduce reliance on any single partner or region, mitigating risks from geopolitical instability or shifting priorities of external actors, while enhancing institutional resilience and flexibility in resource access.

Negotiation and adaptation emerged as crucial strategies for managing dependencies on powerful external entities, such as international accrediting bodies and foreign government agencies. Administrators described negotiating requirements and adapting curricula or administrative procedures to align with international standards, often essential for securing legitimacy, funding, or access to student markets. Framed by RDT, this proactive engagement illustrates how IHEIs navigate constraints, modifying internal structures and processes to secure critical external validation and resources vital for international competitiveness.

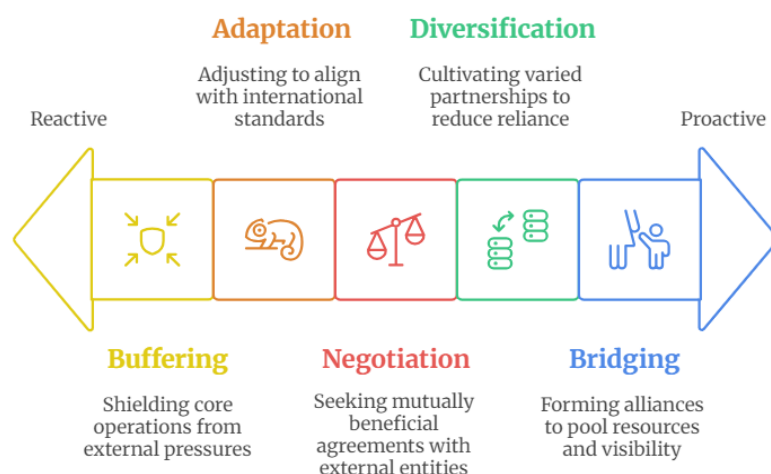
Institutions employed strategies to balance dependencies related to their Islamic identity with broader internationalization goals. This involved engaging selectively with Islamic funding bodies and scholarly networks while pursuing partnerships with secular global universities and mainstream international accreditation. Some IHEIs developed niche programs targeting students interested in Islamic studies, managing this dependency alongside efforts to attract a diverse international student body. RDT highlights this as managing potentially conflicting dependencies to secure both identity-specific and general academic resources.

Institutions demonstrated clear buffering and bridging strategies to manage external resource dependencies. Establishing specialized international offices functioned as a buffering approach, allowing institutions to regulate their engagement with the global landscape while safeguarding their academic missions. In contrast, bridging efforts were evident in developing strategic partnerships with prominent international universities and involvement in global academic networks. These collaborations enabled resource sharing and increased international presence. Viewed through the Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) lens, these measures reflect structural and relational strategies Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) use to shape their external environments and secure essential resources.

More broadly, the observed approaches—including diversification, negotiation, adaptation, balancing religious identity with external expectations, and buffering and bridging—highlight the deliberate strategic posture IHEIs adopt in managing dependencies. Instead of passively accepting external limitations, these institutions actively navigate their environments to reduce vulnerability, secure key resources such as funding and accreditation, and enhance institutional autonomy. This proactive engagement aligns with RDT's central premise: organizations adopt strategic behaviour to manage and mitigate critical external dependencies. The complexity and nature of these resource dependencies are illustrated in Figure 3, which clarifies how IHEIs mobilize internal and external strategies to sustain operations and fulfil academic and religious missions.

### Figure 3

*Strategies of IHEIs to manage external dependencies*



*Note.* IHEIs manage external dependencies through diversification, negotiation, adaptation, balancing identity, and buffering and bridging strategies.

### Resource Constraints and Institutional Hurdles: Challenges in IHEI Internationalization through the RDT Lens

Financial limitations emerged as a primary constraint across all cases, directly impacting internationalization scope. Consistent with RDT, this scarcity limits strategic autonomy. IHEIs often depend heavily on fluctuating domestic budgets or specific Islamic funding bodies, making resource flows unpredictable. Intense competition for limited international grants further exacerbates this dependency, hindering efforts to secure stable funding required for sustained global engagement and program development, thus constraining growth and innovation in international activities.

Geopolitical instability, particularly affecting potential partnerships in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority regions, presented significant hurdles. This aligns with RDT's focus on environmental turbulence creating resource uncertainty. Furthermore, restrictive national policies regarding visas or cross-border collaborations in some host countries created dependencies on governmental goodwill, limiting institutional maneuverability. These political and regulatory constraints directly impacted IHEIs' ability to form stable alliances and access international student markets, which are crucial resources for their internationalization agendas.

A recurrent challenge involved balancing the institutions' specific Islamic identity and mission with the demands of secular international academic standards (Roy et al., 2020) and accreditation bodies. RDT highlights this as managing conflicting dependencies: securing legitimacy from global actors sometimes required compromises that could dilute the unique institutional ethos. This tension necessitated careful negotiation and adaptation, as misalignment could restrict access to vital resources, including international partnerships, funding streams, and globally mobile students seeking recognized qualifications.

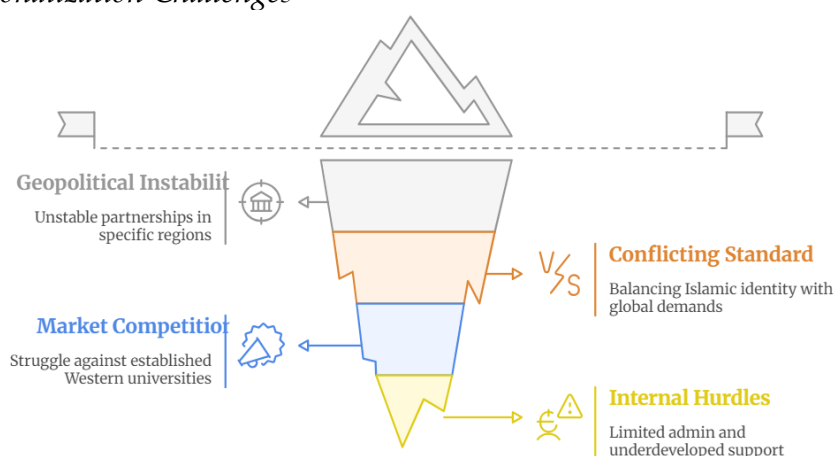
Intense competition in the global higher education market posed a significant challenge, particularly in attracting international students and high-profile faculty. Newer or less-resourced IHEIs often struggled against established Western universities, reflecting a dependency based on relative position and reputation. This perceived legitimacy deficit, viewed through RDT, constitutes a major constraint, hindering the acquisition of critical human and reputational resources necessary for

successful internationalization and limiting their ability to negotiate favorable partnership terms.

Internal institutional hurdles frequently compounded external resource constraints. Limited administrative capacity, insufficient staff with international expertise, and underdeveloped support structures for international students were common across the cases. Resource Dependence Theory implies that effective management of external dependencies requires adequate internal capabilities. The lack of such capacities in some IHEIs restricted their ability to implement internationalization strategies, efficiently absorb external resources, and navigate the complex demands of global academic engagement. The detailed IHEI internationalization challenges are shown in figure 4 below:

**Figure 4**

*IHEI Internationalization Challenges*



*Note.* The main challenges of IHEI internationalization: financial constraints, Islamic identity-global standards tension, geopolitical instability, and market competition

### **Leveraging Global Engagement: Opportunities for Resource Acquisition and Dependency Mitigation in IHEIs**

Internationalization offers IHEIs significant opportunities to diversify their resource base, mitigating reliance on often constrained domestic funding and student pools. Findings indicate that global engagement opens access to previously untapped international student markets, providing crucial tuition revenue and enriching campus diversity. Furthermore, institutions successfully leveraged international platforms to attract funding from global foundations and philanthropic organizations beyond traditional Islamic sources. This diversification, consistent with RDT, enhances financial stability, reduces vulnerability to local resource fluctuations and strengthens institutional resilience.

Global engagement is a vital pathway for IHEIs to acquire legitimacy and enhance institutional reputation, key intangible resources. Seeking and achieving international accreditation, although challenging, was considered crucial for signaling quality and gaining recognition beyond national or regional context. Partnerships with prestigious international universities similarly conferred reputational benefits. Resource Dependence Theory frames this pursuit of external validation as a strategic effort to secure a favorable position within the global academic field, thereby attracting other resources such as students and faculty.

International collaborations present opportunities for accessing diverse



knowledge networks and specialized expertise, addressing internal resource gaps. Joint research projects and faculty exchanges facilitated knowledge transfer and innovation, particularly in fields with limited domestic expertise. Document analysis revealed numerous agreements supporting curriculum development and access to advanced research methodologies through international partners. From an RDT perspective, these collaborations represent strategic resource acquisition, allowing IHEIs to enhance their intellectual capital and research capacity without solely relying on internal development.

Findings suggest that internationalization allows IHEIs to strategically leverage their unique Islamic identity as a resource within specific global niches. Institutions successfully attracted international students and scholars seeking high-quality Islamic studies programs unavailable elsewhere. Partnerships with institutions in Muslim-majority countries were cultivated to access mission-aligned funding and collaborative opportunities. RDT frames this as capitalizing on unique resource dependencies within a targeted segment of the global environment, turning a potential constraint into a strategic advantage.

Viewed through Resource Dependence Theory, internationalization collectively empowers IHEIs to proactively manage their external environment and gain greater strategic autonomy. By diversifying funding sources, accessing global talent pools, securing international legitimacy, and leveraging unique identity niches, institutions reduce critical dependencies on limited or uncertain domestic resources. This enhanced resource base provides greater flexibility in decision-making and strengthens capacity to pursue institutional goals, ultimately mitigating constraints and fostering sustainable development within the competitive global higher education landscape. The detailed Strategic Benefits of Internationalization for IHEIs are shown in figure 5 below:

**Figure 5**

*Strategic Benefits of Internationalization for IHEIs*



*Note.* The strategic benefits of internationalization for IHEIs, including resource diversification, enhanced legitimacy, access to knowledge networks, and leveraging Islamic identity as a competitive advantage

### **Comparative Insights: How Varying Dependencies Shape Internationalization Strategies and Outcomes across IHEI Cases**

Comparative analysis revealed distinct internationalization strategies linked to varying funding dependencies across the IHEIs. Public institutions, more reliant on

state budgets, often aligned international efforts with national policies and bilateral agreements, managing dependencies on government agencies. Conversely, private IHEIs employed more aggressive diversification strategies, actively seeking international student fees, philanthropic donations, particularly from Islamic sources, and commercial partnerships to mitigate financial vulnerability, consistent with RDT's emphasis on securing critical financial resources through environmental negotiation.

Dependency on student markets significantly shaped recruitment and program development strategies. Institutions heavily reliant on specific regions, such as Southeast Asia or the Middle East, tailored marketing campaigns and academic offerings to these niches. Those aiming for broader global recognition faced greater competition but diversified recruitment efforts more widely. Resource Dependence Theory explains this variation as strategic adaptation to secure student enrollment, a vital resource determined by the concentration or diversification of market dependencies.

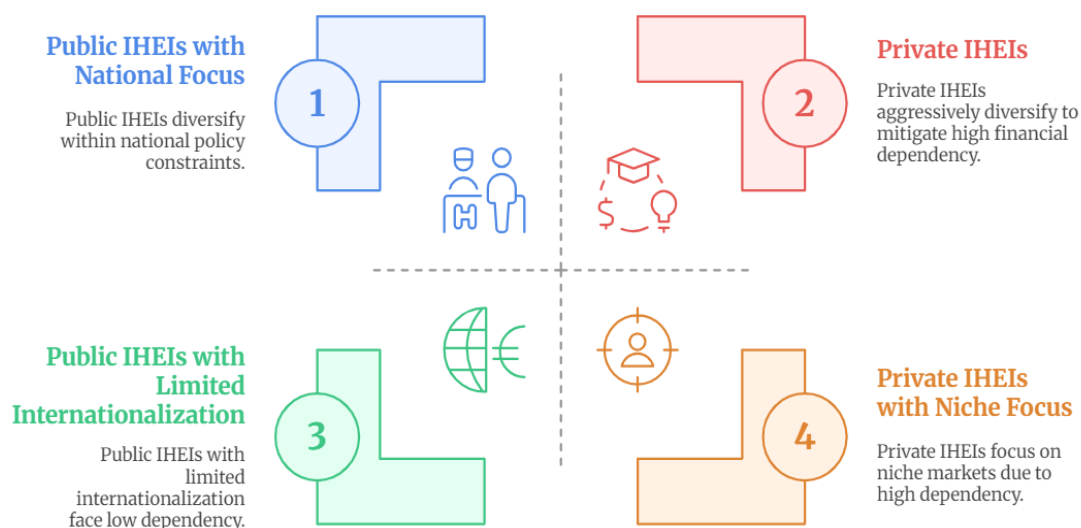
Variations were observed in managing dependencies related to international accreditation and legitimacy. IHEIs highly dependent on attracting globally mobile students or prestigious Western partners pursued international accreditation more vigorously, making significant internal adaptations to meet external standards. Institutions less dependent on these global resources engaged more selectively with accreditation bodies, sometimes prioritizing national or Islamic validation frameworks. This aligns with RDT, showing that strategic responses are proportional to the perceived criticality of the dependency for resource acquisition.

Institutions varied in prioritizing dependencies linked to Islamic identity versus broader academic resources, shaping their strategic approaches. Some emphasized collaboration within the Muslim world and sought recognition from Islamic scholarly authorities, reflecting reliance on religious legitimacy and access to niche, faith-aligned resources. In contrast, others adopted a more intricate strategy to reconcile identity-specific dependencies with aspirations for global academic legitimacy. This balancing act highlights the relevance of Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) in explaining how institutions respond to conflicting external pressures.

The comparative analysis across cases reinforces the utility of RDT in interpreting internationalization pathways of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs). Each institution's distinct mix of resource demands and external dependencies—including financial inputs, student recruitment, institutional legitimacy, and religious identity—shaped its strategic responses and adaptation mechanisms. These differences determined how institutions navigated challenges and seized opportunities in a globalizing academic environment. Where resource scarcity or complex external expectations were pronounced, institutions faced greater constraints and demonstrated creative, adaptive strategies to manage dependencies. This dynamic illustrates how environmental pressures can drive limitations and innovation in faith-based institutions' internationalization efforts. The nuanced relationships between internationalization strategies and institutional dependencies in IHEIs are shown in Figure 6, offering a framework for understanding their unique developmental paths within a competitive global **landscape**.

## Figure 6

*Internationalization Strategies and Dependencies in IHEIs*



*Note.* The relationship between internationalization strategies and the types of resource dependencies IHEIs face shows how different strategies are applied to manage different dependencies.

## Discussion

The findings reveal that Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) actively internationalize to secure critical resources, including funding, international students, faculty expertise, and institutional legitimacy, aligning with Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) (Alenezi, 2023). These institutions navigate complex dependencies on foreign governments, accreditation bodies, and partner universities while balancing their Islamic identity with global academic standards (Яремчук, 2023). Financial constraints and geopolitical instability emerged as major challenges, yet IHEIs employ strategies such as diversification, negotiation, and niche programming to mitigate risks. Comparative analysis highlights variations in strategies based on institutional type (public/private) and regional focus, reinforcing RDT's premise that organizations adapt to environmental pressures to secure resources (Barney et al., 2021). Overall, the study demonstrates how IHEIs strategically manage dependencies to enhance autonomy and global competitiveness.

The challenges and strategies observed arise from the interplay between external resource scarcity and institutional missions. Financial limitations arise from reliance on volatile domestic funding and competition for international grants, prompting IHEIs to seek alternative revenue streams (Moscardini et al., 2022). Geopolitical tensions, particularly in Muslim-majority regions, disrupt partnerships, while secular accreditation demands create ideological tensions with Islamic educational principles (Diaby et al., 2023). These pressures illustrate RDT's assertion that organizations must negotiate dependencies to survive. For IHEIs, this means balancing religious identity with global integration, often through curricular adaptations or selective partnerships (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). Proactive strategies – such as diversifying collaborations or establishing international offices – highlight institutional agency in reshaping resource environments despite constraints.

The consequences of these dynamics are multifaceted. Successful internationalization enables IHEIs to diversify funding, attract global talent, and gain legitimacy, thereby reducing vulnerabilities (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). For instance,

partnerships with Western universities enhance research output (Rachman et al., 2024), while Islamic niche programs tap into underserved markets. Conversely, over-reliance on specific resources (e.g., regional student markets) risks instability, and accreditation compromises may dilute institutional identity (Singh et al., 2022). RDT clarifies that such trade-offs are inevitable, requiring IHEIs to continually adapt to shifting dependencies (Kanmodi et al., 2024). Internally, limited administrative capacity exacerbates these challenges, hindering effective resource management. Internationalization offers growth opportunities, but demands careful negotiation of competing priorities to sustain long-term viability.

Comparatively, this study contrasts with prior research on mainstream universities, which often overlook the unique religious dependencies of IHEIs (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). While secular institutions prioritize rankings and global branding, IHEIs face dual pressures to uphold Islamic values and meet secular standards – a tension less examined in existing literature (S. Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023). Similarly, studies on Global South universities emphasize financial constraints but seldom explore how religious identity shapes resource strategies. This study addresses these gaps by applying RDT to IHEIs, revealing how identity-specific dependencies (e.g., Islamic accreditation) intersect with broader academic goals (Siregar et al., 2021). These insights enrich understanding of how non-Western, faith-based institutions navigate globalization.

To address these challenges, policymakers and IHEI leaders should prioritize three actions. Conceptually, RDT should be expanded to incorporate identity-based dependencies, offering a framework for faith-based institutions (Cross & Carman, 2022). Methodologically, future research could employ longitudinal designs to track how IHEIs adapt strategies over time. Practically, governments and accreditors should develop inclusive policies recognizing Islamic educational models, reducing ideological clashes (Sithole, 2024). IHEIs should also invest in administrative capacity and hybrid programs that integrate religious and secular curricula. By adopting these measures, IHEIs can leverage internationalization to achieve sustainability without compromising their mission.

## Conclusion

This study highlights how Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) strategically pursue internationalization to secure essential resources while navigating challenges tied to their religious identity and global academic integration. The findings demonstrate that financial sustainability, international student recruitment, faculty expertise, and institutional legitimacy are primary drivers of internationalization. IHEIs manage these priorities through diversified partnerships, negotiations with accrediting bodies, and curricular adaptations. Significant constraints, such as geopolitical instability, competition with secular universities, and tensions between Islamic principles and global accreditation standards limit their autonomy. The research emphasizes how IHEIs leverage their unique position by developing niche Islamic education programs and cultivating cross-border collaborations to address these challenges. These insights provide valuable answers to the central question of how IHEIs balance their dual mission of religious preservation and global academic engagement.

The study contributes by applying Resource Dependence Theory to faith-based

institutions, revealing how religious identity creates distinct patterns of organizational dependency. Methodologically, the comparative case study approach offers a robust framework for examining internationalization strategies across different institutional contexts. By combining in-depth interviews with comprehensive document analysis, the research captures both the strategic intentions and practical implementations of internationalization policies. These methodological choices provide a model for future studies of non-Western higher education institutions. The findings bridge an important gap in literature by connecting global higher education trends with the specific realities of Islamic institutions, offering new perspectives into how religious identity shapes organizational behavior in academic settings.

Several limitations of this study point to valuable directions for future research. Focusing on four institutions, while providing analytical depth, suggests the need for broader comparative studies across diverse geographical and institutional contexts. Reliance on administrative perspectives could be complemented by incorporating student and faculty viewpoints to provide a more comprehensive understanding of internationalization impacts. A longitudinal approach would track how IHEIs adapt their strategies over time in response to changing global conditions. Emerging areas, such as digital internationalization and virtual exchange programs, also warrant investigation, particularly regarding how online platforms might help IHEIs overcome current resource constraints. Addressing these gaps would further enhance understanding of how religiously-affiliated institutions navigate global higher education while maintaining their distinctive identities.

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