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 uses 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 balancing Islamic identity-specific dependencies. Key strategies include diversification of 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 new 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.

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). However, while mainstream universities have been extensively studied, Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) remain under-researched 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). Studies highlight the role of global rankings and funding in shaping international strategies but 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 example, while Akkerman et al., (2021) analyzes global competition, he overlooks 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 analyze how IHEIs mitigate resource constraints, offering practical solutions for sustainable growth. Given the rising demand for cross-cultural education, this research addresses an urgent need for inclusive internationalization models.
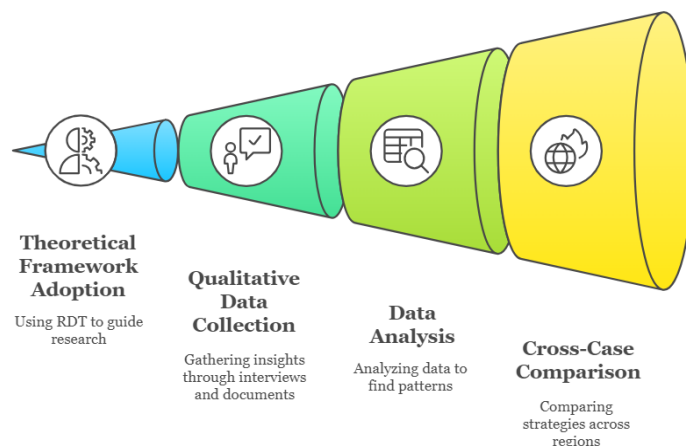
This study aims to systematically examine the internationalization strategies of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) through the lens of Resource

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 diversification of partnerships, negotiation with accrediting bodies, and adaptation 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—spanning both Islamic and secular academic networks—will 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 incur higher adaptation costs, potentially diluting their Islamic mission while seeking international legitimacy (Huang et al., 2022). These hypotheses will be tested through qualitative case studies, providing empirical insights into how IHEIs strategically navigate their unique dependencies in the global higher education landscape.

METHOD

The study focuses on the internationalization of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) as 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 to understand 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 can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Research Process Funnel for IHEI Internationalization

Theoretical Framework Adoption
Using RDT to guide research

Qualitative Data Collection
Gathering insights through interviews and documents

Data Analysis
Analyzing data to find patterns

Cross-Case Comparison
Comparing strategies across regions

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, supplemented 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). The selection of four IHEIs from different regions (Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Western countries) ensures comparative insights into how varying dependencies shape internationalization strategies (Avolio & Benzaquen, 2024). The qualitative design allows for 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 identifying 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. As Resource Dependence Theory posits, the perceived need for these external resources significantly shapes the strategic direction and operational focus of IHEI internationalization initiatives, compelling 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. Managing these dependencies effectively was frequently cited by administrators as essential for navigating the complexities of the international higher education landscape and accessing vital resources.
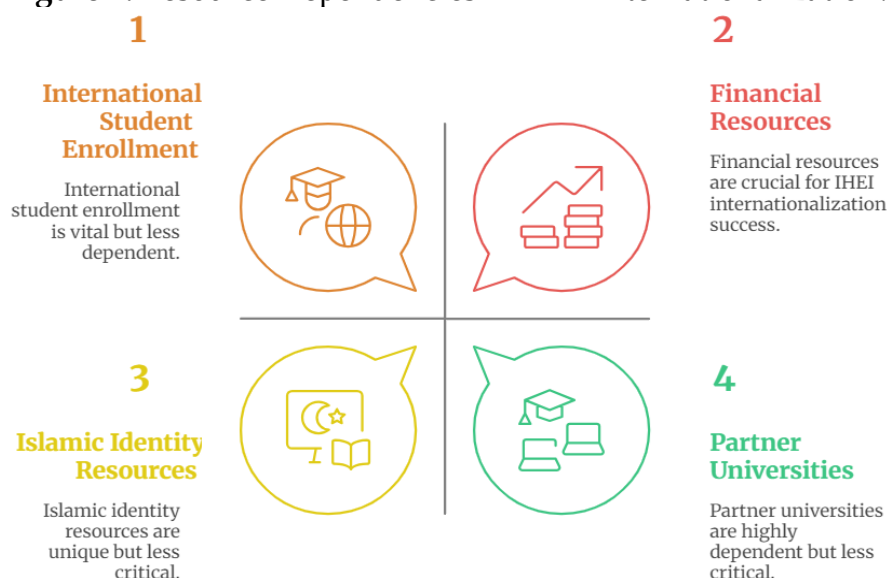
Beyond general academic resources, findings highlighted dependencies unique

to the Islamic identity of the institutions (Sahin, 2018). These encompassed 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 helps frame this as managing a distinct set of dependencies crucial for maintaining institutional mission and identity while pursuing broader international academic integration, sometimes creating complex balancing acts for administrators.

Stakeholders across the cases frequently articulated perceptions of resource scarcity and significant environmental constraints impacting internationalization. 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 challenges in aligning Islamic educational principles with secular international standards were prominent themes. 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 was often contingent upon achieving specific accreditation standards or establishing partnerships with Western universities, demonstrating linked resource needs. Similarly, attracting international students often depended 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 maneuvering required by IHEIs. The detailed resource dependencies can be seen in figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Resource Dependencies in IHEI Internationalization.

1

International Student Enrollment

International student enrollment is vital but less dependent.

2

Financial Resources

Financial resources are crucial for IHEI internationalization success.

3

Islamic Identity Resources

Islamic identity resources are unique but less critical.

4

Partner Universities

Partner universities are highly dependent but less critical.

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

Consistent with Resource Dependence Theory's predictions, IHEIs actively employed diversification strategies to manage external dependencies (Jaafar et al.,

2023). Interviewees across cases detailed efforts to cultivate a wide array of international partnerships for student exchange, research collaboration, and joint degree programs. Document analysis corroborated this, revealing numerous Memoranda of Understanding with institutions globally. This strategy aimed to reduce reliance on any single partner or region, thereby mitigating risks associated with geopolitical instability or shifting priorities of specific external actors, enhancing institutional resilience and resource access flexibility.
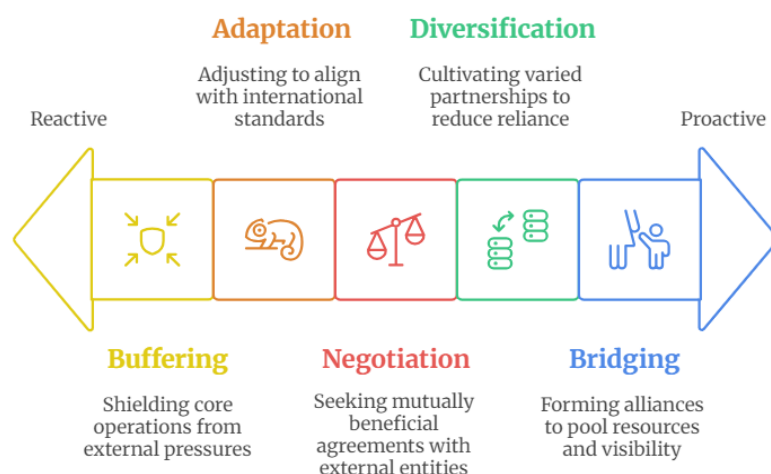
Negotiation and adaptation emerged as crucial strategies for managing dependencies on powerful external entities like international accrediting bodies and foreign government agencies. Administrators described processes of negotiating requirements and adapting curricula or administrative procedures to align with international standards, often necessary for securing legitimacy, funding, or access to student markets. This proactive engagement, as framed by RDT, illustrates how IHEIs maneuver within constraints, modifying internal structures and processes to secure critical external validation and resources vital for international competitiveness.

Institutions demonstrated specific strategies to balance dependencies related to their Islamic identity with broader internationalization goals. This involved selectively engaging with Islamic funding bodies and scholarly networks while simultaneously pursuing partnerships with secular global universities and seeking mainstream international accreditation. Some IHEIs developed niche programs appealing to specific student segments 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 in response to 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 through developing strategic partnerships with prominent international universities and involvement in global academic networks. These collaborations enabled institutions to share resources and increase their 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 ensure a reliable flow of essential inputs.

More broadly, the observed approaches—including diversification, negotiation, adaptation, balancing religious identity with external expectations, and buffering and bridging—highlight the deliberate and strategic posture IHEIs take in managing their dependencies. Instead of passively accepting external limitations, these institutions actively navigate their environments to reduce vulnerability, acquire 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 below. It clarifies how IHEIs mobilize internal and external strategies to sustain their operations and fulfil academic and religious missions.

Figure 3. Strategies of IHEIs to manage external dependencies

Adaptation — Adjusting to align with international standards

Diversification — Cultivating varied partnerships to reduce reliance

Reactive

Proactive

Buffering — Shielding core operations from external pressures

Negotiation — Seeking mutually beneficial agreements with external entities

Bridging — Forming alliances to pool resources and visibility

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. As RDT suggests, this scarcity forces difficult choices and 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 external political and regulatory constraints directly impacted IHEIs' ability to form stable alliances and access international student markets, crucial resources for their internationalization agendas.
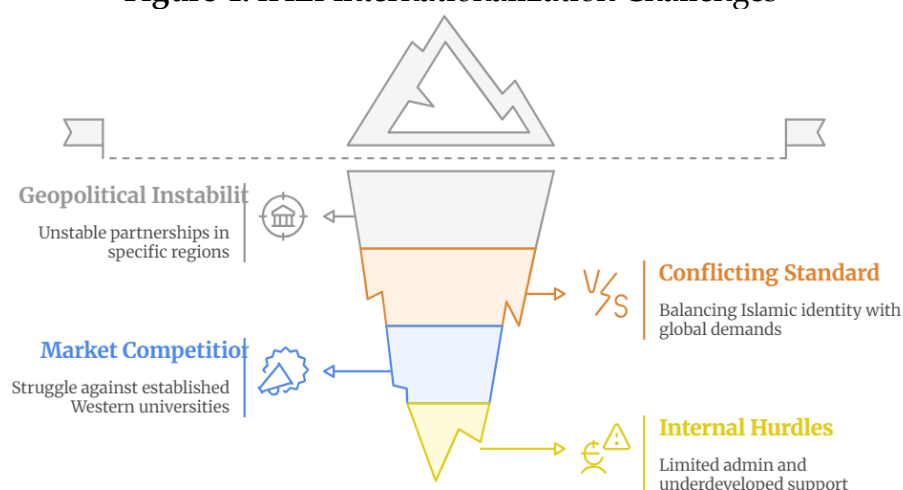
A recurrent challenge involved balancing the institutions' specific Islamic identity and mission with the demands of secular international academic standards (Roy et al., 2020) and accreditation bodies. RDT highlights this as managing conflicting dependencies; securing legitimacy (a resource) from global actors sometimes required compromises perceived as potentially diluting the unique institutional ethos. This tension necessitated careful negotiation and adaptation, as failure to align could restrict access to vital resources like international partnerships, funding streams, and globally mobile students seeking recognized qualifications.

Intense competition within the global higher education market posed a significant challenge, particularly concerning 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, acts as a major constraint, hindering the acquisition of critical human and reputational resources necessary for successful internationalization and limiting their ability to negotiate

favorable terms in partnerships.

Internal institutional hurdles frequently compounded external resource constraints. Limited administrative capacity, insufficient staff with international expertise, and underdeveloped support structures for international students were commonly cited issues across the cases. Resource Dependence Theory implies that effective management of external dependencies requires adequate internal capabilities. The lack thereof within some IHEIs restricted their ability to effectively implement internationalization strategies, absorb external resources efficiently, and navigate the complex demands associated with global academic engagement successfully. The detailed IHEI Internationalization Challenges can be seen in figure 4 below:

Figure 4. IHEI Internationalization Challenges

Geopolitical Instability
Unstable partnerships in specific regions

Conflicting Standard
Balancing Islamic identity with global demands

Market Competition
Struggle against established Western universities

Internal Hurdles
Limited admin and underdeveloped support

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 engaging globally opens access to international student markets previously untapped, 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 and reduces vulnerability to shifts in local resource availability, strengthening institutional resilience.

Global engagement serves as a vital pathway for IHEIs to acquire legitimacy and enhance institutional reputation, key intangible resources. Seeking and achieving international accreditation, although challenging, was perceived as crucial for signaling quality and gaining recognition beyond national or regional spheres. Establishing partnerships with prestigious international universities similarly conferred reputational benefits. Resource Dependence Theory frames this pursuit of external validation as a strategic move to secure a favorable position within the global academic field, thereby attracting other resources like students and faculty.
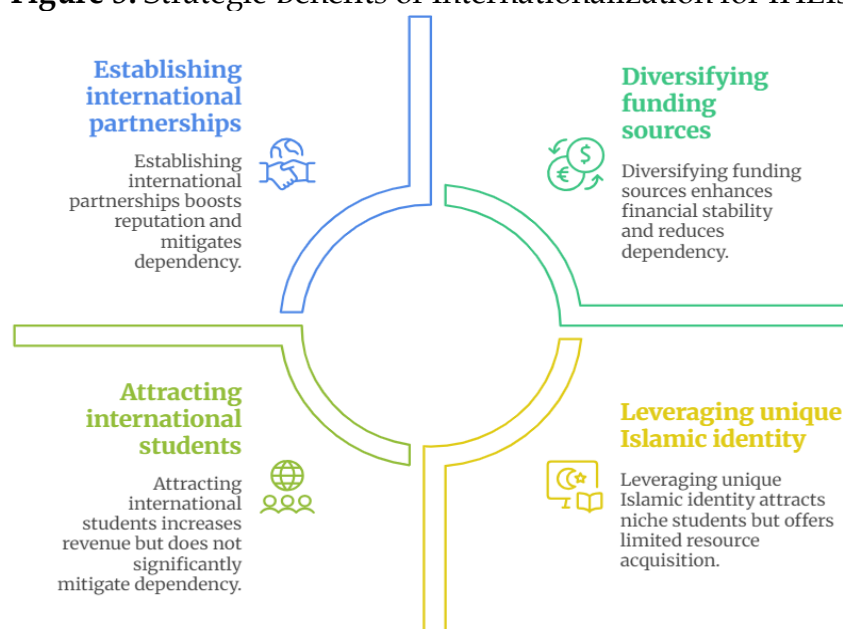
International collaborations present substantial opportunities for accessing diverse knowledge networks and specialized expertise, addressing internal resource gaps. Joint research projects and faculty exchanges facilitated knowledge transfer and

innovation, particularly in fields where domestic expertise was limited. Document analysis revealed numerous agreements aimed at curriculum development and accessing 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 specifically interested in high-quality Islamic studies programs unavailable elsewhere. Partnerships with institutions in Muslim-majority countries were cultivated to access specific funding and collaborative opportunities aligned with their mission. RDT helps understand 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, the opportunities presented by internationalization collectively empower 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 their 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 can be seen in figure 5 below:

Figure 5. Strategic Benefits of Internationalization for IHEIs

Establishing international partnerships
Establishing international partnerships boosts reputation and mitigates dependency.

Diversifying funding sources
Diversifying funding sources enhances financial stability and reduces dependency.

Attracting international students
Attracting international students increases revenue but does not significantly mitigate dependency.

Leveraging unique Islamic identity
Leveraging unique Islamic identity attracts niche students but offers limited resource acquisition.

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 focused international efforts congruent with national policies and bilateral agreements, managing dependencies on government agencies. Conversely, private IHEIs exhibited more aggressive diversification strategies, actively seeking international student fees, philanthropic donations, particularly from Islamic sources, and commercial partnerships to mitigate financial vulnerability, aligning with RDT's emphasis on securing critical financial resources through environmental negotiation.
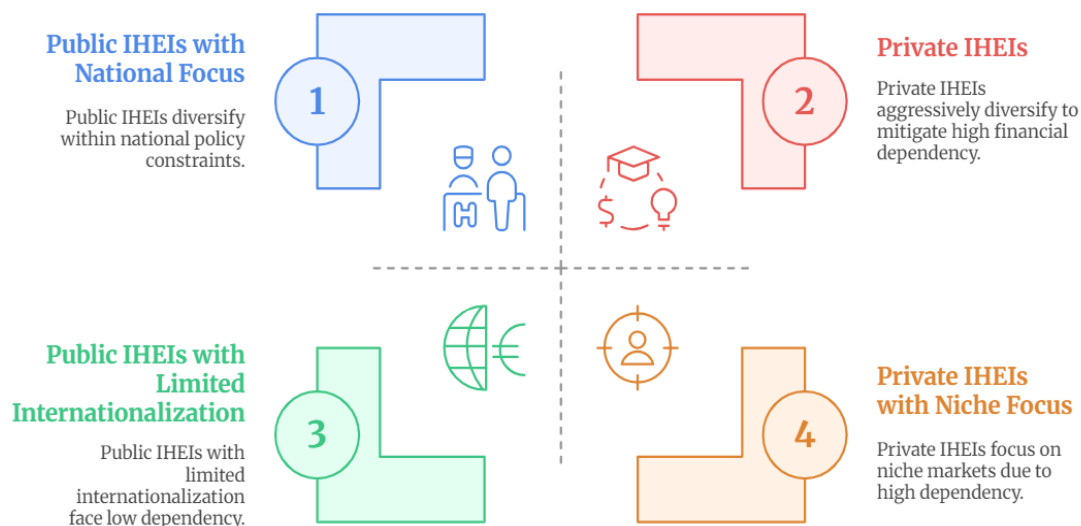
The nature of dependency on student markets significantly shaped recruitment and program development strategies. Institutions heavily reliant on specific regional markets, such as Southeast Asia or the Middle East, tailored marketing campaigns and academic offerings to meet the demands of those niches. 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, dictated 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, undertaking significant internal adaptations to meet external standards. Institutions less dependent on these specific global resources demonstrated more selective engagement with accreditation bodies, sometimes prioritizing national or Islamic validation frameworks. This aligns with RDT, showing strategic responses are proportional to the perceived criticality of the dependency for resource acquisition.

Institutions varied in prioritizing dependencies linked to Islamic identity compared to broader academic resources, shaping their strategic approaches. Institutions sometimes emphasized collaboration within the Muslim world and sought recognition from Islamic scholarly authorities. This reflected a deep reliance on religious legitimacy and access to niche resources aligned with faith-based educational objectives. In contrast, other institutions adopted a more intricate strategy to reconcile identity-specific dependencies with aspirations for global academic legitimacy. This strategic balancing act highlights the relevance of the 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 more pronounced, institutions often faced greater constraints and demonstrated creative and 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 visually represented 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

Public IHEIs with National Focus — Public IHEIs diversify within national policy constraints.

Private IHEIs — Private IHEIs aggressively diversify to mitigate high financial dependency.

Public IHEIs with Limited Internationalization — Public IHEIs with limited internationalization face low dependency.

Private IHEIs with Niche Focus — Private IHEIs focus on niche markets due to high dependency.

Discussion

The findings reveal that Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) actively engage in internationalization to secure critical resources such as 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 like diversification, negotiation, and niche programming to mitigate risks. Comparative analysis highlights variations in strategies based on institutional type (public/private) and regional focus, underscoring 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 stem from the interplay between external resource scarcity and institutional missions. Financial limitations arise from reliance on volatile domestic funding and competition for international grants, forcing 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 reflect RDT's assertion that organizations must negotiate dependencies to survive. For IHEIs, this means balancing religious identity with global integration, often requiring curricular adaptations or selective partnerships (Hasan & Juhannis, 2024). The proactive strategies employed—such as diversifying collaborations or establishing international offices—highlight institutional agency in reshaping resource environments despite constraints.

The consequences of these dynamics are multifaceted. On one hand, successful internationalization enables IHEIs to diversify funding, attract global talent, and gain legitimacy, reducing vulnerabilities (de Wit & Altbach, 2021). For example, 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; IHEIs must continually adapt to shifting dependencies (Kanmodi et al., 2024). Internally, limited administrative capacity exacerbates these challenges, hindering effective resource management. Thus, while internationalization offers growth opportunities, it also demands careful negotiation of competing priorities to sustain long-term viability.

Comparatively, this study contrasts with prior research focusing 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 rarely explore how religious identity shapes resource strategies. This study bridges 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). Such 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 themselves should invest in administrative capacity and hybrid programs blending religious and secular curricula. By adopting these measures, IHEIs can better 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 complex challenges tied to their religious identity and global academic integration. The findings demonstrate that financial sustainability, international student recruitment, faculty expertise, and institutional legitimacy emerge as primary drivers of internationalization efforts. IHEIs actively manage these priorities through diversified partnerships, negotiations with accrediting bodies, and curricular adaptations. However, significant constraints like geopolitical instability, competition with secular universities, and tensions between Islamic principles and global accreditation standards limit their autonomy. The research particularly emphasizes how IHEIs leverage their unique position by developing niche Islamic education programs and cultivating cross-border collaborations to overcome these challenges. These insights provide valuable answers to the study's central question about how IHEIs balance their dual mission of religious preservation and global academic engagement.

The study makes important contributions 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 thorough document analysis, the research captures both the strategic intentions and practical implementations of internationalization policies. These methodological choices provide a model for future studies examining non-Western higher education institutions. The findings bridge an important gap in literature by connecting discussions about global higher education trends with the specific realities of Islamic institutions, offering new perspectives on how religious identity shapes organizational behavior in academic settings.

Several limitations of this study point to valuable directions for future research. The focus on four institutions, while allowing for depth of analysis, suggests the need for broader comparative studies across more diverse geographical and institutional contexts. The reliance on administrative perspectives could be complemented in future work by incorporating student and faculty viewpoints to provide a more comprehensive understanding of internationalization impacts. A longitudinal approach would help track how IHEIs adapt their strategies over time in response to changing global conditions. Emerging areas like digital internationalization and virtual exchange programs present another important frontier for research, particularly how online platforms might help IHEIs overcome some of their current resource constraints. Addressing these gaps would further enhance our understanding of how religiously-affiliated institutions can navigate the complexities of global higher education while maintaining their distinctive identities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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