

## Strategies and Policies for Internationalization of Higher Education in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** Internationalization of higher education has become a strategic priority in improving and enhancing the global Indonesian higher education institutions. This study aims to analyze internationalization strategies and policies implemented in Indonesian higher education institutions and identify the main challenges faced. A literature review was employed by examining national policies, internationalization models, and best practices from several universities across Indonesia. The findings indicate that the key internationalization strategies include academic mobility, international collaboration, digital technology utilization, and the implementation of Good University Governance (GUG). Leadership, particularly transformational leadership, plays a crucial role in driving effective internationalization policies. However, challenges such as limited funding, regulatory discrepancies, and the preparedness of human resources remain significant barriers. Therefore, more flexible policies and stronger support from both the government and higher education institutions are essential to strengthen and sustain internationalization efforts.

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**Keywords:** Internationalization, Higher Education, Policy, Strategy, Indonesia, Transformational Leadership, Good University Governance, Digital Technology.

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### A. INTRODUCTION

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The internationalization of higher education is a strategic agenda aimed at enhancing academic and institutional competitiveness in the era of globalization. Universities in various countries are strengthening their international engagement through various strategies, such as academic collaboration, student and faculty mobility, and the integration of digital technologies in teaching and learning. Internationalization is also seen as a key instrument to improve academic quality, expand global cooperation networks, and prepare graduates to be more competitive in the global job market (Knight, 2023).

In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has initiated several policies to foster the internationalization of higher education. Programs such as Kampus Merdeka, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), and efforts to increase international accreditation are part of the national strategy. However, the implementation of these policies continues to face several challenges, including limited funding, regulatory complexity, and institutional readiness to meet international standards (Smith & Edwards, 2023).

Internationalization in Indonesian higher education also faces governance-related issues, human resource limitations, and sustainability of the programs that have been designed. Many

universities are still adapting to the demands of globalization, which requires the transformation of the higher education system to be more open and responsive to international collaboration. Therefore, the effectiveness of current policies must be carefully evaluated to ensure their long-term impact and sustainability.

Furthermore, the approaches taken by Indonesian universities in pursuing internationalization vary significantly. Some institutions have been successful in strengthening academic cooperation and student mobility, while others still struggle to align with global standards. This study aims to explore the strategies adopted by Indonesian higher education institutions in their efforts to meet international standards. The study objectives are to identify the strategies that have been implemented by Indonesian universities in internationalization, analyze the effectiveness of existing policies, and explore the challenges encountered in their implementation. Furthermore, this study will also provide policy recommendations to strengthen the capacity of higher education institutions in facing the challenges of internationalization.

## **B. METHOD**

This study employs a library research method as a qualitative approach to systematically review various scientific publications, policy documents, institutional reports, and journal articles relevant to the topic of university internationalization in Indonesia. Data collection was conducted by searching academic databases such as Scopus, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and official portals of ministries and universities. The inclusion criteria consisted of articles published within the last 10 years (2015–2024), using either conceptual or empirical approaches, and relevant to strategies, policies, and practices of higher education internationalization. Data analysis was carried out using a thematic approach to identify patterns, issues, and trends emerging from the reviewed literature.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. The Concept of Internationalization of Higher Education**

Internationalization of higher education is defined as a systematic process of integrating international dimensions into the core functions of higher education, including education, research, and community service (Knight, 2023). This process may take the form of academic mobility, international partnerships, and the development of a globally-oriented curriculum. Models of internationalization of higher education are classified into four main approaches (Altbach & de Wit, 2022). First, the Fragmentation Model. Internationalization is implemented sporadically without clear coordination between units within the university. Institutions applying this model tend to have unsustainable internationalization initiatives, often dependent on specific individuals or units without institution-wide policies. As a result, the benefits are uneven and lack significant impact on the university as a whole. This model can be observed in some universities in developing countries, where exchange programs are limited to certain faculties without strong institutional support.

Second, the Integration Model. Internationalization becomes part of the institutional strategy, supported by coordinated policies and programs. In this model, the university has a clear internationalization policy and a dedicated unit responsible for managing international

cooperation, academic mobility, and globally aligned curriculum development. An example is the National University of Singapore (NUS), which has an Office of International Relations that coordinates all internationalization programs in an integrated manner.

Third, the Transformation Model. Internationalization significantly changes the institution's organizational structure and governance. Universities adopting this model often carry out major reforms in academic systems, administration, and institutional culture to better respond to global demands. For instance, University College London (UCL) restructured its curriculum and evaluation system to align with European standards and strengthen its global partnerships.

Fourth, the Comprehensive Model. Internationalization is fully integrated into all academic and administrative aspects of the institution. This model represents the highest level of internationalization, embedded in academic policies, governance, research, and partnerships with international stakeholders. Maastricht University in the Netherlands exemplifies this approach by applying internationalization across all academic units, offering multilingual curricula, and implementing global strategies in both research and public services.

## **2. Higher Education Internationalization Strategy**

Common strategies for internationalization of higher education in Indonesia include four key strategies. First, academic mobility. This is one of the main forms of internationalization that encourages the exchange of students, faculty and researchers between domestic and foreign institutions. The underlying idea is that international experiences enrich academic perspectives, broaden professional networks, and enhance cross-cultural competence. Programs such as the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) enable Indonesian students to study for a semester at international partner universities, fully funded by the government. This not only increases students' global exposure but also strengthens the international reputation of their home institutions (MoEC, 2024).

Second, international cooperation. International collaboration is a key strategy that includes joint research, dual or double degree programs, academic exchanges, and participation in global consortia. Rooted in the principle of mutual benefit, these efforts enhance the academic capacity of both institutions. For example, the University of Indonesia (UI) and the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB) are active in global partnerships. UI collaborates with Leiden University and the University of Melbourne in research and academic mobility, while ITB offers double degree programs with Kyoto University and TU Delft in engineering and science (QS World University Rankings, 2024). Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) has programs like the 'ASEAN+3 University Network' and a dedicated Global Relations Office to strengthen its international presence (UGM International Office, 2023). At the Asian level, National Taiwan University (NTU) stands out with over 600 active international collaborations in research and academic mobility.

Third, the utilization of digital technology. Digital Learning Platforms (DLPs) are essential tools for supporting internationalization by expanding access to cross-border learning (Gaddafi et al., 2018). DLPs refer to technology-based systems that enable online teaching and learning—either synchronously or asynchronously—on a global scale. DLPs accelerate international collaboration through initiatives like virtual guest lectures, MOOCs (Massive

Open Online Courses), and online exchange programs. A global example is edX, founded by Harvard and MIT, which offers thousands of courses to millions of learners worldwide. In Europe, the University of London uses its DLP to reach students in more than 190 countries. In Indonesia, Bina Nusantara University (BINUS) developed BINUSMAYA as a digital learning platform that facilitates joint classes and virtual mobility with overseas campuses. These practices demonstrate that DLPs not only expand access but also enhance institutional competitiveness on a global scale.

Fourth, Good University Governance (GUG). Transparent and accountable governance is essential to supporting internationalization (Smith & Edwards, 2023). GUG enables universities to collaborate more effectively with international partners, enhance academic competitiveness, and obtain global accreditations. According to Altbach & Knight (2023), institutions with strong governance structures are more likely to be included in international education networks. However, challenges such as complex bureaucracy, limited resources, and lack of awareness of globally oriented governance principles remain. Therefore, policy reform and capacity building are crucial for strengthening GUG to support internationalization.

### **3. Internationalization Policies and Regulations in Indonesia**

The Indonesian government has issued various policies to support internationalization. First, the Government of Indonesia has designed strategic policies and regulations to encourage the internationalization of higher education. One such regulation is Permendikbud No. 53 of 2015, which emphasizes the importance of improving the quality of higher education by enhancing global relevance and international cooperation. This initiative is reinforced by Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023, which provides a new framework for higher education governance, including an emphasis on student and faculty exchange programs, global academic collaborations, and international accreditation as key indicators of institutional quality.

Conceptually, the internationalization of higher education involves integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the core functions of universities—teaching, research, and community service (Knight, 2008). Key manifestations include structured international collaborations, such as joint degrees, collaborative research, or accreditation by international bodies like ABET, AACSB, or ASIIN. The goal of internationalization is not only to enhance global reputation but also to produce graduates who are competent at both regional and global levels (de Wit et al., 2015). According to a report by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), by the end of 2022, only around 90 universities in Indonesia had study programs with international accreditation, mostly at state universities and top-tier private institutions. Additionally, international collaborations are still largely concentrated in universities located in Java and Bali, with limited participation from institutions outside these regions (Sulastris et al., 2022).

The challenges to implementing these policies are not only structural—such as limited funding, access to global networks, and a shortage of competent personnel in internationalization management—but also cultural and institutional. Many universities still operate with a local focus, lack an academic culture that fosters cross-border collaboration, and

are led by individuals who may not fully understand the strategic importance of internationalization in the context of global competitiveness (Yuliani & Rakhmawati, 2021). Moreover, varying perceptions and resistance to change present further obstacles. Some higher education institutions still view internationalization as a bureaucratic process rather than a long-term strategic transformation. This undermines the implementation of initiatives like joint research, international curriculum development, and faculty participation in global conferences or training programs.

Although regulations such as Permendikbud No. 53 of 2015 and Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 offer a clear policy framework, their success largely depends on the internal capacity of universities to build global networks, pursue institutional transformation, and foster an academic culture open to internationalization. Second, efforts to internationalize higher education in Indonesia are also supported by the government's Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, particularly through the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) initiative. This program provides students with the opportunity to study abroad for one semester at top global universities while earning academic credit from their home institutions in Indonesia.

Mobility programs such as IISMA represent a concrete form of internationalization abroad one of the main dimensions of higher education internationalization according to Knight (2008). Studying abroad not only enhances students' academic and global competencies but also builds intercultural understanding, international networks, and familiarity with diverse learning environments. These are critical for developing graduates who are competitive and adaptable in a global context (de Wit et al., 2015). In terms of policy, IISMA is a flagship initiative launched by the Directorate General of Higher Education in 2021. Since its inception, it has grown significantly. According to official data (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), 2,256 Indonesian students have participated, attending over 100 partner universities in countries such as the UK, the Netherlands, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the United States. The program offers full scholarships, including tuition, travel, insurance, and living expenses, expanding access for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

The positive impact of IISMA has been well-documented. Research by Azhari & Cahyadi (2022) found that participants improved significantly in cross-cultural communication, academic independence, and critical thinking in global settings. Furthermore, the program's credit recognition mechanism encourages curriculum flexibility and fosters the development of international, competency-based curricula. Despite these benefits, challenges remain—particularly the readiness of home institutions to implement credit transfer and provide post-program support. Participation from private and regional universities also remains relatively low, highlighting disparities in access to international mobility opportunities.

Overall, MBKM and IISMA exemplify government-driven initiatives aimed at transforming higher education towards greater global engagement. These programs not only broaden Indonesian students' access to international education but also strengthen Indonesia's presence in the global academic landscape through cross-border partnerships. Third, another key policy encouraging the internationalization of higher education is Permendikbudristek No. 56 of 2022 concerning National Higher Education Standards. This regulation promotes curriculum internationalization, including the use of English as a medium of instruction, the

strengthening of global partnerships, and the alignment of learning outcomes with international standards. It encourages universities to adopt Outcome-Based Education (OBE) that aligns with international benchmarks.

Curriculum internationalization refers to the deliberate inclusion of global perspectives in course content, pedagogy, and assessment. Knight and de Wit (2018) argue that an internationalized curriculum enhances graduates' readiness to face global challenges, expands their intercultural awareness, and improves their employability in international job markets. Key indicators include English-medium instruction, international course offerings, and guest lectures by foreign academics (Beelen & Jones, 2015). However, implementation remains uneven, especially among private and regional universities. A survey by the Directorate of Learning and Student Affairs (2023) reported that only about 15% of Indonesian universities offer international or English-taught programs. Common challenges include a lack of faculty fluent in English-language pedagogy, limited access to international academic resources, and the absence of a clear internationalization roadmap.

Sudirman et al. (2021) note that although national policies set clear directions, successful implementation depends on institutional capacity, leadership commitment, human resource development, and supporting technologies. Many universities still rely on domestically oriented curricula and show limited responsiveness to global trends. Only a few institutions – such as BINUS University, President University, and Universitas Indonesia – have consistently developed and maintained internationalized curricula. Furthermore, the use of English as a medium of instruction is hindered by student readiness and faculty confidence. Wicaksono & Frimanto (2022) found that over 60% of faculty at non-elite universities reported feeling unprepared to teach in English, citing both linguistic and pedagogical barriers.

Thus, while Permendikbudristek No. 56 of 2022 provides a forward-looking framework, its success depends on technical assistance, faculty training, policy incentives, and long-term international partnerships. Without adequate institutional preparedness and resources, curriculum internationalization risks becoming a superficial rather than substantive transformation. Fourth, a strategic indicator of higher education internationalization is the inclusion of Indonesian universities in global rankings, such as QS World University Rankings, Times Higher Education (THE), and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). The Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology (DG Diktiristek) continues to support universities in enhancing their visibility and competitiveness on the global stage as part of the broader internationalization strategy.

International rankings serve as external benchmarks of a university's global performance—based on academic reputation, research quality, international faculty and student ratios, and scientific impact (Hazelkorn, 2015). Despite critiques of their methodology, scholars like Marginson (2014) recognize global rankings as important tools for institutional reputation, academic diplomacy, and strategic positioning, influencing student choices and international partnerships. In the QS World University Rankings 2024, 19 Indonesian universities were listed, up from 16 the previous year. Leading institutions include Universitas Indonesia (ranked 237th), Universitas Gadjah Mada (263rd), Institut Teknologi Bandung (281st), and Universitas Airlangga (345th) (QS Top Universities, 2024). These results reflect

progress in metrics such as international publications, academic reputation, and international faculty and student presence.

Nevertheless, only a small proportion of the total of 4,200+ universities in Indonesia are globally ranked, and most of them are still dominated by public universities in Java. The MoEC (2023) attributes this gap to disparities in research management, human resource quality, global networking, and the volume of international publications, particularly in private and regional institutions. Additionally, most universities struggle with International Faculty Ratio and International Student Ratio, key components in QS rankings. This suggests that internationalization remains uneven, particularly in terms of global mobility and international appeal (QS, 2024). Hence, improving rankings is not just about branding—it requires deeper reforms in curriculum, research quality, international engagement, and strategic leadership based on global standards. In conclusion, global rankings are essential indicators of the outcomes of internationalization efforts. The government and universities must use these benchmarks not merely as targets, but as a springboard for continuous improvement and sustainable transformation toward becoming world-class institutions.

#### **4. Implementation of Internationalization Strategy**

First, limited funding to support internationalization programs. Limited funding remains one of the main obstacles to the internationalization of higher education in Indonesia. Although the government has allocated an endowment fund to support this sector, the amount is still insufficient to meet the needs of all institutions. As of the end of 2021, the Education Fund Management Institution (LPDP) managed an endowment fund of IDR 99.10 trillion, comprising IDR 81.11 trillion for education, IDR 7.99 trillion for research, IDR 7 trillion for universities, and IDR 3 trillion for cultural development. However, only IDR 7 trillion is specifically allocated to universities, which must be shared among numerous institutions across the country, resulting in relatively small allocations per university.

This funding limitation significantly affects universities' ability to support various internationalization programs, such as student and faculty exchanges, joint research with foreign institutions, and the improvement of international publication quality. Without sufficient financial resources, it is difficult for universities to meet global standards and remain competitive internationally. In addition, limited funding hampers the improvement of human resources, infrastructure, and other supporting facilities that are crucial for international activities. Therefore, a more comprehensive funding strategy and increased investment in higher education are needed to ensure that Indonesian universities can meet global standards and compete effectively.

Second, complex regulations that make international cooperation difficult. The process of establishing international cooperation in Indonesian universities often faces bureaucratic challenges due to regulatory complexities. Although the Ministry of Education and Culture issued Regulation No. 14/2014 to provide a legal framework for university cooperation, its practical implementation still faces significant administrative hurdles. Conceptually, this regulation aims to provide a clear legal framework in the implementation of cooperation between universities in Indonesia and foreign institutions. However, in practice, some universities experience difficulties in fulfilling the administrative requirements set. For

instance, the licensing process that requires approval from various parties often takes a long time, thus hampering the smooth running of the planned cooperation.

Third, lack of readiness in language and intercultural competence. The limited foreign language proficiency and insufficient understanding of global cultures among lecturers and students are significant barriers to internationalization. Poor mastery of foreign languages impedes participation in international forums and the publication of research in reputable journals. Additionally, the lack of global cultural awareness weakens the effectiveness of international collaborations. Proficient English skills are essential for both students and lecturers to engage in international programs and prepare students for the global labor market. However, language implementation must be supported by adequate training to ensure effective learning. Intercultural competence is equally important. Deddy Mulyana (2024) emphasizes the role of credibility and intercultural competence in the workforce, especially in a globalized world that demands cross-cultural communication skills.

Some institutions have taken initiatives to improve language competency and global cultural understanding. The S.Tr. Diponegoro University's Applied Foreign Language study program, for example, held a public lecture with the theme "Mastering Intercultural Competence in Global Business" featuring a speaker from ELTE University, Hungary, to add students' insights into global cultural diversity. However, these efforts are still sporadic and uneven across universities in Indonesia. A comprehensive national strategy is needed to enhance language and cultural competencies among lecturers and students so they can effectively participate in global academia and improve the nation's competitiveness.

Fourth, there is a lack of international academic culture. Academic cultures that support internationalization, such as cross-country research collaboration and participation in international conferences, are still underdeveloped. Academic culture that supports internationalization, such as cross-country research collaboration and participation in international conferences, still needs to be improved in Indonesia. International research collaboration is an important indicator of an advanced academic culture. The Research Collaboration Indonesia (RKI) program, involving 21 autonomous public universities (PTNBH), aims to enhance research quality through inter-institutional collaboration. However, participation in such programs needs to be broadened, particularly among non-PTNBH and private universities.

Lecturers' participation in international conferences is also an important measure of international academic culture. For example, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA) reported limited participation in international conferences in 2018, such as ASAIHL in Japan and the 11th ICER in Thailand. This reflects that despite those efforts made to engage in the global academic community, the level of participation still needs to be improved. Fifth, internal bureaucracy is still rigid. The inflexible administrative structure in many Indonesian universities is a major obstacle to international cooperation. Complicated procedures and lengthy decision-making processes delay the implementation of internationalization programs and reduce institutional competitiveness.

Inefficient bureaucracy can affect various aspects of internationalization, including recruitment of international students, research collaborations, and academic exchanges. Long licensing processes and poor inter-agency coordination discourage foreign students from



choosing Indonesia as a study destination. Sixth, there is a lack of transformational leaders with a vision of internationalization. Transformational leadership plays a crucial role in advancing Indonesian universities to the global level. Unfortunately, there is still a shortage of leaders with global perspectives and strong international networks.

Transformational leadership is characterized by the leader's ability to inspire and motivate the academic community to achieve a higher vision, including the internationalization of the institution. Leaders with this style encourage innovation, adaptation to global change, and the development of an academic culture that supports international collaboration. Research shows that transformational leadership contributes significantly to improving the competitiveness of universities in the Industry 4.0 era. Some of the main challenges in developing transformational leadership with a focus on internationalization in Indonesian universities include three main points: (i) limited global insight. Some higher education leaders do not have sufficient international experience or exposure, thus lacking an understanding of the dynamics of global higher education. (ii) lack of international networks. The lack of connections with overseas institutions hinders opportunities for collaboration in research, student exchanges, and joint academic programs. (iii) resistance to change. A conservative organizational culture may hinder the implementation of innovative internationalization policies.

## **5. Challenges in Internationalization**

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#### **D. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

With a holistic and integrated approach, internationalization of higher education in Indonesia can be an effective strategy to enhance global reputation, expand academic networks, and enrich students' learning experiences. Internationalization goes beyond academic exchange; it also involves transforming institutional culture, restructuring governance, and leveraging technology to drive cross-border collaboration.

In addition, university leaders must be able to play the role of progressive change agents. Transformational leadership is essential to foster a global vision, build an innovative culture, and encourage participation from the entire academic community in the internationalization process. Leaders must also be capable of strategically managing resources and establishing strong partnerships with international stakeholders. Several strategic policy recommendations can be delineated into seven key steps. First, improving coordination between the government and universities. Policy synergy between the central government and higher education institutions is essential to accelerate the internationalization agenda. The government should simplify regulations related to international cooperation permits, academic visa issuance, and recognition of foreign degrees—for example, streamlining MoU legalization processes, offering incentives for cross-border collaborative research, and recognizing international certifications. Coordination among the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Finance is needed to harmonize funding and educational diplomacy.

Second, building a digital ecosystem for global collaboration. Strengthening digital infrastructure such as cloud-based learning platforms, international research repositories, and cooperation management systems is vital. Universities should develop integrated platforms

that are accessible to global partners. Third, developing internationalization performance indicators. Clear and measurable indicators are needed to assess universities' internationalization progress. These may include the number of international collaborative publications, participation in global consortia, the presence of international students, and institutional positions in global university rankings.

Fourth, integrate internationalization into the curriculum and academic activities. Curriculum internationalization is crucial to equip students with global competencies. This can be achieved through multilingual course offerings, cross-cultural learning modules, and the integration of global perspectives into teaching and learning. Fifth, strengthening global alumni networks and academic diasporas. Indonesian alumni and academic diaspora abroad are strategic assets for internationalization efforts. Universities should develop alumni tracking systems and foster global alumni networks to act as international ambassadors for their institutions.

Sixth, increasing access to internationalization funds. Governments and institutions should provide dedicated funding schemes for internationalization programs, including scholarships for mobility, collaborative research grants, and international accreditation funding. Partnerships with the private sector and international donor agencies should also be expanded. However, such partnerships must be based on mutual benefit – not merely serving as internship sites or markets for foreign students, but rather as platforms for co-developing research and innovation. Seventh, building the capacity of international leadership and management. International leadership training programs for rectors, deans, and international cooperation managers should be held regularly. These trainings could cover academic diplomacy, international project management, and cross-cultural negotiation skills. By implementing these recommendations, it is expected that both public and private universities in Indonesia can become more competitive in the global higher education landscape. Internationalization is not merely an administrative agenda—it is a transformative process that requires a long-term vision, institutional commitment, and meaningful cross-border collaboration.

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