

Strategic Institutional Reform in Islamic Higher Education: The Case of Two Pesantren-Based Universities

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ABSTRACT. Institutional transformation within *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions has become an increasingly significant phenomenon, especially as these institutions seek to strengthen their position amid global competition. There are three purposes of the study: (1) the driving factors behind organizational change in *pesantren*-based Islamic universities, (2) the processes through which institutional transformation is implemented, and (3) the implications of these changes for institutional development. Employing a qualitative multi-case study approach, the research was conducted at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari (UNHAS) in Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA) in Probolinggo. Methodologically, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The results indicate that institutional change is driven by three main factors: the pressure of global competition and market demands, the need to reinforce Islamic and *pesantren*-based values, and efforts to improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency. The transformation process is implemented incrementally through internal mergers between institutions under a single foundation. This research contributes to enhanced service quality and increased institutional competitiveness by drawing lessons from organizational changes that led to the restructuring of institutional governance in *pesantren*-based universities.

Keywords: *Organizational Change, Islamic Higher Education, Pesantren-based Universities, Institutional Transformation, Educational Management.*

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INTRODUCTION

In an era characterized by rapid global transformation, social change has grown increasingly complex, influencing multiple dimensions of societal life, including the education sector. Higher education institutions, as critical components within the broader social system, inevitably experience pressures to adapt and transform to meet emerging societal demands (Aeni, 2020; Alwi, 2022). Such transformations require strategic adjustments in institutional governance and policy directions,

enabling universities to foster innovation and effectively respond to contemporary challenges (Sofanudin & Atmanto, 2020; Wekke et al., 2018). Therefore, analyzing how higher education institutions strategically manage and navigate change is crucial, particularly in contexts marked by both tradition and modernity.

Pesantren as a type of Indigenous educational institution has shifted from its earlier characteristics, which focus on teaching Islamic teachings from medieval ages (see Dhofier, 1980). *Pesantren* institutions now uniquely integrate traditional Islamic education and contemporary academic frameworks and contribute to character building (Fuad et al., 2020), economic empowerment (Asrol et al., 2023; Nugraha et al., 2021; Priyanto & Fathoni, 2019), and prevent radicalization through education that emphasizes tolerance and religious values (Asrohah et al., 2025; Kader et al., 2024; Sadiyah, 2022; Saim & El-Muhammady, 2025; Zarkasi et al., 2024). Despite existing literature addressing *pesantren's* social contributions, detailed analyses of their institutional transformation processes—particularly regarding changes in academic and organizational structure under dual ministerial regulation—remain limited. In its latest development, *pesantren* even established higher education, i.e. universities or institutes. They mostly focus on Islamic studies and in this paper, some of them start to embrace non-religious subjects, i.e. social sciences, natural sciences, technology, etc. The growth of higher education in Indonesia reflects a dynamic trajectory, with significant expansions and institutional transformations evident across the educational landscape. By 2023, Indonesia had more than 4,000 higher education institutions, reflecting a notable increase alongside varied institutional restructuring (Kemendikbud, 2023). In Islamic higher education area, restructuring can be found in terms of organizational and cultural. Various studies indicates scientific integration in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions, especially the contextualization of Islamic law through integration of religious and secular knowledge (*Ijtibād*), which indicates epistemological and institutional challenges in knowledge integration models (Daulay, Siregar, & Akhyar, 2025).

Next studies discusses how Islamic educational institutions serve as actors in global religious-political competition by promoting national distinctiveness and moderate pluralism in the Muslim world (Allès & tho Seeth, 2021). In a focus on gender and curriculum, another study focuses on female students' gender identity negotiation moving from *pesantren* to university that requires identity mediation and curriculum adaptation in the destined *pesantren*-based university (Mustofa, Marijan, Romadhoni, & Setia (Farhanillah et al., 2025; Karman et al., 2025; Rofiq et al., 2024)wan, 2023). Additionally, the internalization of *pesantren* values into the scientific paradigm and academic culture at *pesantren*-based university demonstrates how traditional *pesantren* principles translate into modern educational frameworks and graduate character building (Haryanto, Sukawi, & Muslih, 2025). In terms of leadership, Islamic legal opinions (*fatwās*) on reflecting tensions between traditional adherence and adaptation to modern contexts within NU-affiliated *pesantren*-based higher education (Hannan, Huda, Firdaus, Afabih, & Musth(Adeoye et al., 2025; Radhi et al., 2025; Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025; Tihabsah et al., 2024)ofa, 2024). Most previous studies focus on adaptation curriculum and cultural adaptation in the Islamic higher education. Those research are nuanced by how education quality in Islamic universities could improve, examined from the perspective of educational studies and social issues around the learning processes. This paper fills the gap of study by focusing on the structural transformation of *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions, by carrying out comparative studies in two *pesantren*-based universities, tracing its internal dynamics and its development as well.

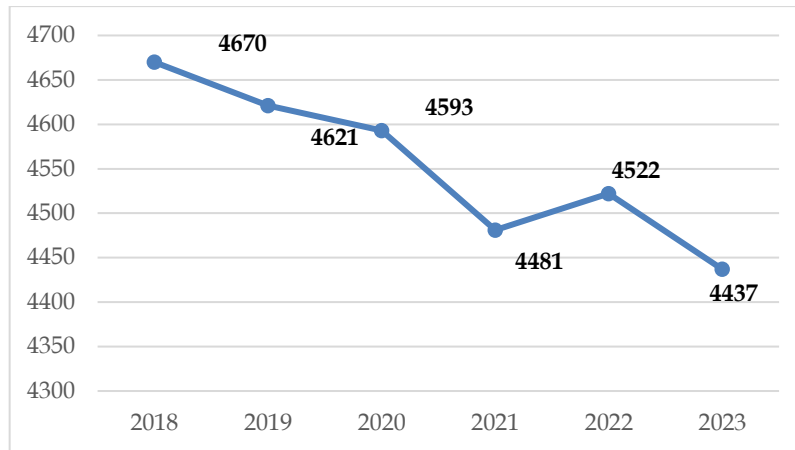


Figure 1 Number of Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia from 2018 to 2023

Source: Higher Education Statistics Data; Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (2018), Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education (2019), Ministry of Education and Culture (2020), Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2021), Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022), Ministry of Education and Culture (2023).

This study seeks to address this gap by examining specific cases of institutional transformation at *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions in East Java, Indonesia—namely, Universitas Hasyim Asy’ari (UNHASA) in Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA) in Probolinggo. Both institutions recently transitioned from Sekolah Tinggi (Islamic colleges) format into comprehensive universities, requiring substantial organizational preparedness to meet the requirements of both the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek). This paper aims to answer three research questions of institutional transformation: the conditions prior to organizational restructuring, the processes of institutional change, and the implications for improving institutional quality and academic services.

Table 1. Categories of Institutional Transformation among Pesantren-Based Islamic Higher Education Institutions in East Java

| No | Pattern of Institutional Transformation of Pesantren-Based Islamic HEIs | MoRA Decree (SK Kemenag) | MoRTHE Decree (SK Kemenristekdikti) | |
|--------|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| | | Adding Islamic Study Programs | Establishing New Campuses | Merging Institutions |
| 1 | From College (Sekolah Tinggi) to Institute | 16 | - | - |
| 2 | From College (Sekolah Tinggi) to University | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 | From Institute to University | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| Jumlah | | 26 | 4 | 4 |

Source: Management Information System of Islamic Higher Education Coordination (SIMKOPTA), Region IV.

The core argument of this paper is that successful institutional transformation within *pesantren*-based Islamic universities depends fundamentally on three interconnected elements: transformative leadership, effective stakeholder engagement, and the consistent application of total quality management principles (Darwisyah et al., 2020; Hendrian, 2024; Sukirno, 2017). Without systematic and strategic management of change, institutions may risk undermining their academic quality, sustainability, and institutional identity. Thus, by exploring these dynamics comprehensively,

the study provides theoretical insights and practical recommendations relevant to institutional governance and change management strategies in Islamic higher education.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a multi-case study design to systematically and accurately describe the phenomena, facts, or events within the research contexts. The qualitative method allows the researcher to deeply understand phenomena from participants' perspectives, emphasizing their experiences, behaviors, and the meanings they attach to their social and cultural contexts (Briz et al., 2022; Kellam & Cirell, 2018). Such an approach often involves interpretive analysis aimed at uncovering participants' experienced realities to generate hypotheses and theory rather than merely verifying existing ones (O'Brien, 2016; Ponterotto, 2002). Specifically, a multi-case study approach enables detailed exploration of complex phenomena within their bounded contexts, offering comprehensive descriptions from multiple perspectives, thus providing deeper insights into intricate organizational dynamics (Baxter & Jack, 2015).

The study specifically investigates the phenomenon of institutional transformation at two *pesantren*-based Islamic universities in East Java, Indonesia: Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari in Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid in Probolinggo. These institutions were selected because each demonstrates distinct characteristics in their organizational transformations. Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari initiated its institutional transformation by establishing a new non-religious university that introduced several non-religious study programs, subsequently merging an existing Islamic institute into the newly formed university structure. In contrast, Universitas Nurul Jadid underwent transformation by merging its existing Islamic institute with a previously independent non-religious college. These distinctive pathways provide valuable comparative insights into varied processes and implications of organizational change in Islamic higher education institutions.

Table 2. Comparison between Universitas Hasyim As'ari and Universitas Nurul Jadid in terms of Institutional Change

| No. | Aspect | Similarity between Institutions | Differences |
|-----|----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. | Institutional Change | Change from institute form to university | - Hasyim Asy'ari: Established a new university to open non-religious programs. - Nurul Jadid: Institutional change done by merging Islamic institute with non-religious higher education institutions. |
| 2. | Islamic Educational Institutions | Both institutions are Islamic private educational institutions under pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) | - Hasyim Asy'ari: Previously 'Institut Keislaman Hasyim Asy'ari (IKAHA)' in Tebuireng Pesantren Jombang; now 'Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari (UNHASY)'. - Nurul Jadid: Formerly 'Institut Agama Islam Nurul Jadid (IAINJ)', merged with Nursing School (STIKESNJ) and Technology School (STTNJ) under one pesantren foundation. |
| 3. | Administrative Process | Both universities officially adopted university format in 2018. | - Hasyim Asy'ari: Change started in and linked to opening non-religious study programs starting 2013. - Nurul Jadid: Started to establish Technological College (Sekolah Tinggi Teknologi / STT) in 1999 and followed by medical school (STIKES) in 2009. Merger of two institutions with its religious college within one pesantren foundation started in 2017. |
| 4. | Location | Both located in East Java Province | - Hasyim Asy'ari: Located in Jombang Regency, in Tapal Kuda or Mataraman area southwest/southeast of East Java. - Nurul Jadid: Located in Probolinggo Regency, also in Tapal Kuda or Mataraman area southwest/southeast of East Java. |

Data collection was performed systematically from January to December 2024, employing three primary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Participant observation was conducted by researchers who were directly involved in and observed institutional meetings, strategic discussions, and the daily operational processes relevant to the transformations. This approach enabled researchers to gain authentic insights into institutional behaviors, organizational decision-making, and informal interactions. In-depth interviews were conducted with purposively selected key informants, including senior administrators, rectors, vice rectors, deans, representatives from relevant ministries, faculty members, and students directly involved in or affected by the institutional changes. The informants interviewed at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari (Unhasy) and Universitas Nurul Jadid (Unuja) for the cluster respectively included representatives from various institutional levels. These consisted of one representative from the Foundation, two from the Rector and Vice Rector positions, two Deans and Program Heads, three lecturers, two education staff (database operators), three students, and two representatives from partner institutions. Additionally, one representative from Kopertais represented both research sites. In total there were 31 informants in this research. Additionally, documentary analysis was conducted using internal documents such as strategic plans, ministerial decrees, internal meeting notes, and institutional reports from 2013 to 2025, providing supplementary contextual and historical insights into each institution's transformation.

Table 3. Data Collection Timeline in Universitas Hasyim As'ari and Universitas Nurul Jadid

| University | Location | Time Period | Techniques | Data Needs |
|----------------------------|-------------|-------------------------|------------------|--|
| Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari | Jombang | January - February 2024 | Observation I | Academic atmosphere post organizational structure change; campus infrastructure and organizational culture |
| Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari | Jombang | January - February 2024 | Interview I | Initial condition before structural changes; process and implementation of changes; implications for university existence |
| Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari | Jombang | January - February 2024 | Documentation I | Submission documents for organizational change; decree letter; meeting minutes; attendance lists; activity photos |
| Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari | Jombang | October - November 2024 | Observation II | Meeting conditions during policy determination for university development |
| Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari | Jombang | October - November 2024 | Interview II | University achievements after structural changes; challenges and obstacles in the process; clarifying info as per research focus |
| Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari | Jombang | October - November 2024 | Documentation II | Academic and organizational documents before and after the change; documentation of university achievements |
| Universitas Nurul Jadid | Probolinggo | March - April 2024 | Observation I | Academic atmosphere post organizational structure change; campus infrastructure and organizational culture |
| Universitas Nurul Jadid | Probolinggo | March - April 2024 | Interview I | Initial condition before structural changes; process and implementation of changes; implications for university existence |
| Universitas Nurul Jadid | Probolinggo | March - April 2024 | Documentation I | Submission documents for organizational change; decree letter; merger readiness documents from |

| | | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|--------------------------|------------------|--|
| Universitas Nurul Jadid | Probolinggo | November - December 2024 | Observation II | institutions under foundation; meeting minutes; attendance lists; activity photos Meeting conditions during policy determination for university development |
| Universitas Nurul Jadid | Probolinggo | November - December 2024 | Interview II | University achievements after structural changes; challenges and obstacles in the process; clarifying info as per research focus |
| Universitas Nurul Jadid | Probolinggo | November - December 2024 | Documentation II | Academic and organizational documents before and after the change; documentation of university achievements |

Data analysis employed the interactive analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of four interrelated stages: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Ogbamichael & Warden, 2018). Furthermore, this study integrated three analytic frameworks—domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, and thematic analysis—to systematically categorize, structure, and interpret the collected qualitative data. Domain analysis was utilized to identify broad organizational phenomena and general categories within the data. Taxonomic analysis facilitated detailed examination and organization of the data according to identified subcategories and relationships. Thematic analysis enabled the identification and exploration of emergent themes across the datasets, highlighting patterns and variations between and within the two institutional cases. To ensure how credibility between cases can be maintained, researchers employed consistent data collection procedures by using interview guides and uniform protocols. Interviews, documents, and fieldnotes were compared across cases to confirm finding. To enable cross-cases analysis, data, notes, and documents were organized systematically for each case to be compared.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Driving Factors Behind Institutional Transformation in Pesantren-based Universities

The transformation of *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions into comprehensive universities has evolved dynamically over several decades. Both Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo initiated their higher education developments around the same period. Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari was initially established as a university in 1967, whereas Universitas Nurul Jadid began as an academy in 1968.

Based on findings derived from observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, three principal factors were identified as driving forces behind the institutional transformations at both universities. Firstly, increased global competition and labor market demands significantly influenced the institutions to continuously adapt by expanding academic programs. Secondly, there was a concerted effort to reinforce and enhance Islamic and *pesantren*-based values, which historically constitute the foundational character of these institutions. Lastly, achieving greater effectiveness and efficiency in institutional management emerged as a crucial motivation for restructuring their organizational models.

The institutions explicitly acknowledged the importance of responding to global competition and labor market needs, leading them to open non-religious study programs while preserving core Islamic and *pesantren* values that underpin students' character formation. Furthermore, the transformations were motivated by the realization that effective and efficient organizational restructuring could significantly enhance educational quality and service delivery.

Figure 5 below illustrates the historical timeline and key phases of organizational change experienced by Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo, along with a summary of identified driving factors for institutional transformation.

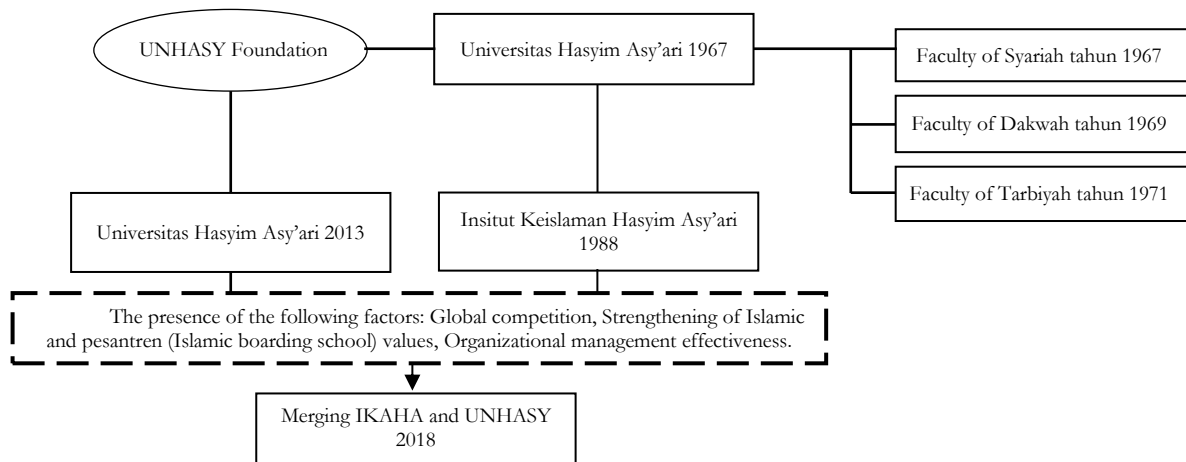
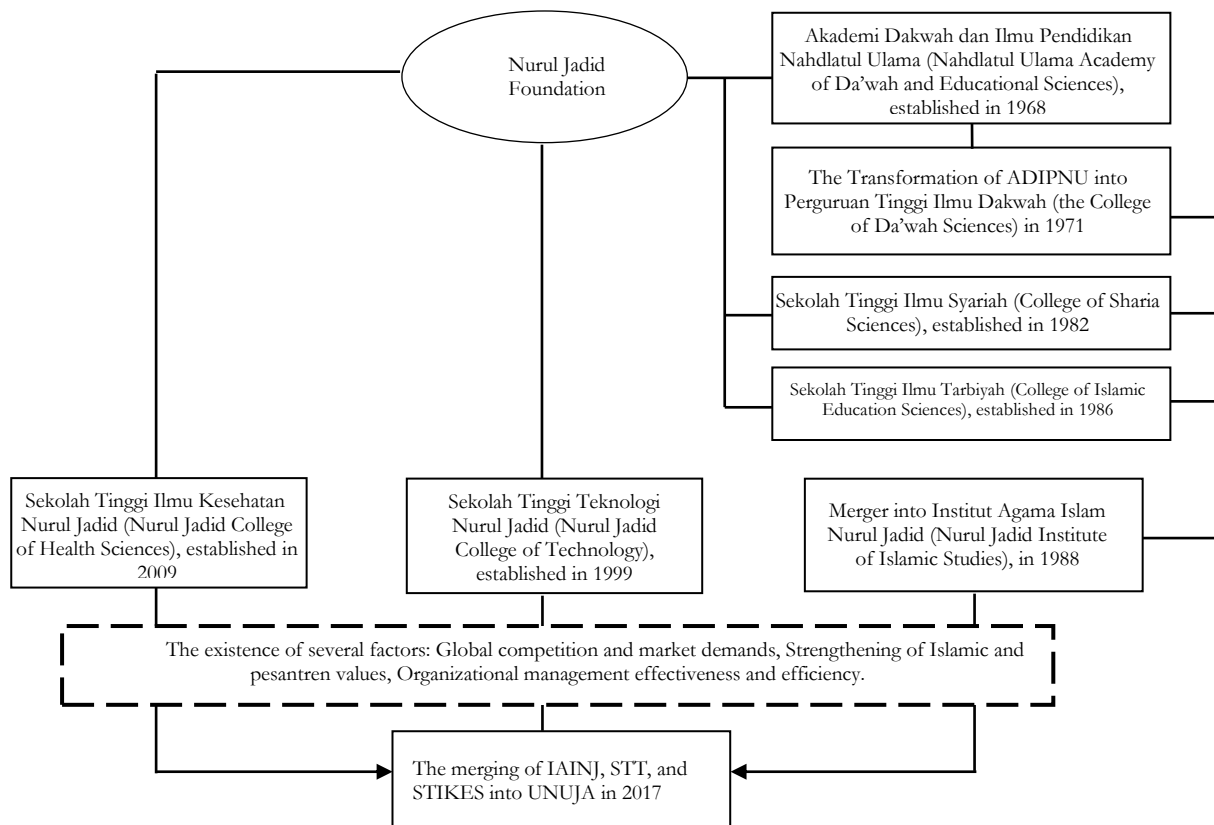


Figure 2. Process and Driving Factors of Institutional Transformation at UNHASY Jombang

As depicted in Figure 2, UNHASY Tebuireng Jombang underwent transformation into Institut Keislaman Hasyim Asy'ari (IKAHA) Tebuireng Jombang in 1988, initially managing three faculties: Sharia Faculty, Da'wah Faculty, and Tarbiyah Faculty. Prior to this transition into IKAHA, the institution had originally been established as a university, which at that time had the authority to offer multiple faculties. The designation "University" re-emerged in 2013 when the foundation established a new institution named Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari. Considerations related to improving institutional governance and enhancing competitiveness became critical driving factors behind the decision to implement further institutional restructuring in 2018.

Figure 3. Process and Driving Factors of Institutional Transformation at UNUJA Probolinggo



On the other hand, efforts to develop higher education at Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid Probolinggo began in 1968 with the establishment of the Akademi Dakwah dan Ilmu Pendidikan Nahdlatul Ulama (ADIPNU). In 1971, ADIPNU transitioned into Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Dakwah (PTID). Subsequently, the foundation continued developing its higher education capacity through establishing new institutions and engaging in institutional mergers. The year 2017 marked a significant milestone in this institutional development, reflecting the foundation's strategic decision to merge various forms of higher education institutions into a single university, thus consolidating resources and aligning strengths toward a unified institutional objective.

In this subset, we learn from institutional change at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari and Unuversitas Nurul Jadid that the transformation of *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions was a complex. The transformation is seeking balance between external socioeconomic factors and internal institutional needs. Both institutions attempt to balance tensions between tradition and modernization by expanding academic offerings, preserving core religious values, and restructuring governance frameworks to improve organizational performance and competitiveness in a global context.

Process of Institutional Transformation in Pesantren-based Islamic Universities

The institutional transformation process in *pesantren*-based Islamic universities involves several distinct phases. Prior to submitting a proposal for institutional change, universities must fulfill minimum requirements, including the availability of a feasibility study, documentation supporting proposals for new study programs, and recommendations from the regional Higher Education Service Institution (Lembaga Layanan Pendidikan Tinggi). In general, the institutional transformation processes at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo involved three critical stages: consensus building among stakeholders, preparation of institutional change documentation, and the formal integration (merger) of institutions.

The institutional changes at both universities originated from thorough needs analyses, which served as a foundational step in planning institutional restructuring. Both universities conducted feasibility studies to determine the viability and direction of proposed changes and subsequently mobilized essential resources to achieve their organizational transformation objectives.

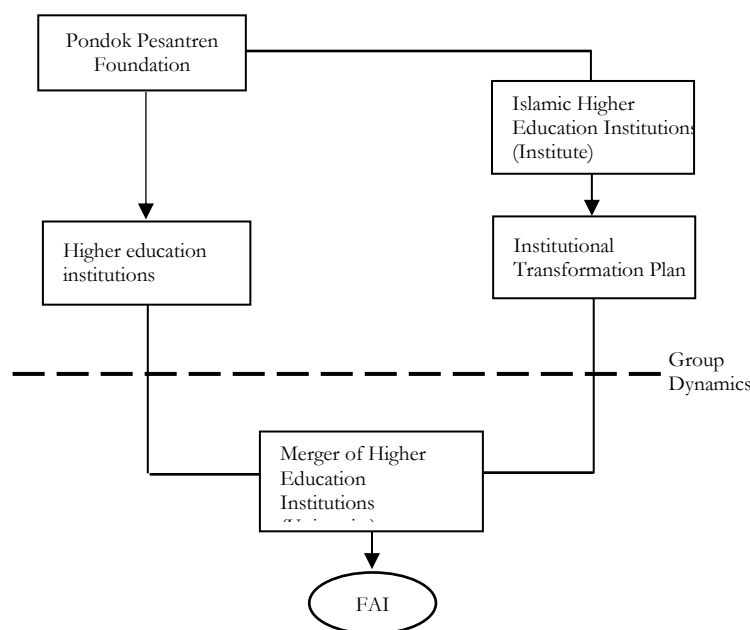


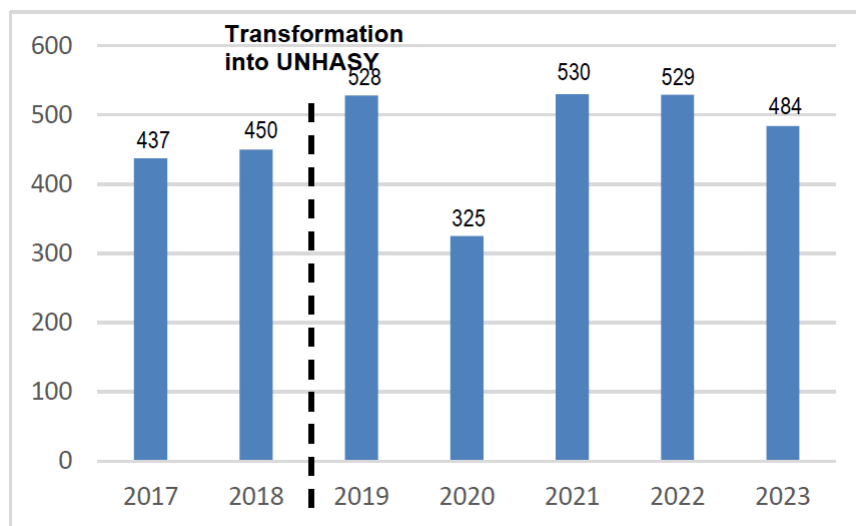
Figure 4. The Process of Institutional Transformation in Islamic Higher Education Institutions

Group dynamics during the institutional transformation processes at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo emerged naturally as a response to organizational adjustments. Differences in opinions and perspectives became apparent prior to the formal approval of the institutional transformation from Institutes to comprehensive Universities. Such differences were expected, given that the restructuring involved merging two or more previously independent institutions. Consequently, various stakeholders held distinct perspectives regarding the substantial changes in institutional management and operational practices.

From this result, we could see that the institutional transformation process is a structured and participatory progression involving three key stages: fulfilling prerequisite requirements like feasibility studies and program documentation, consensus building among diverse stakeholders to address differences in perspectives due to merging independent institutions, and the preparation of detailed documentation leading to formal integration or mergers. This process is based upon needs analysis and resource mobilization. This foundation of decision making could effectively manage group dynamics and organizational adjustments to ensure the sustainability, legitimacy, and improved governance of both universities.

Implications of Institutional Transformation in Pesantren-based Islamic Universities

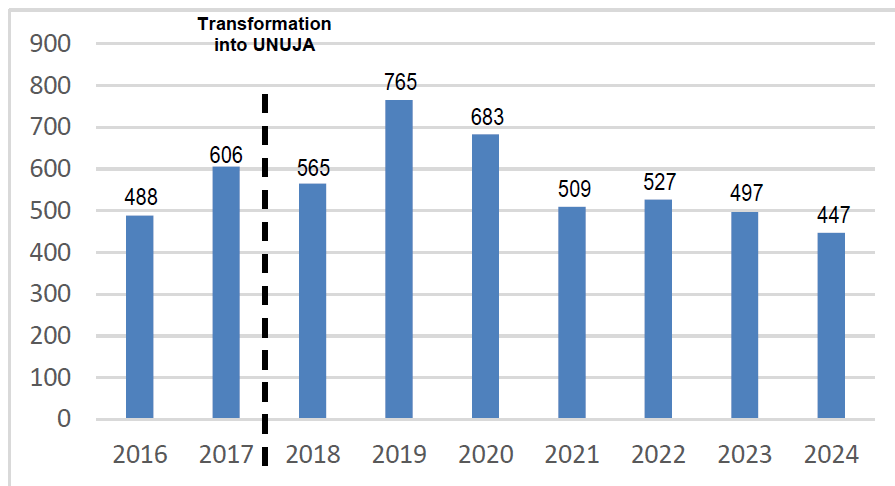
Both Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo experienced similar positive impacts resulting from their institutional transformations, notably enhanced academic quality and increased competitiveness within the global educational landscape. An essential indicator of this increased competitiveness is evident in the growth of new student enrollments following institutional restructuring. This trend addresses initial concerns expressed by some stakeholders that non-religious study programs might reduce interest in traditional Islamic studies. The graph below illustrates trends in new student enrollments at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo after institutional transformation.



Source: UNHAS Y Database and Simkopta Kopertais Region IV

Figure 5. Number of New Students at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) UNHAS Y Jombang, 2017–2023

The trend of new student enrollments at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Jombang following its transformation into a comprehensive university can be observed starting from 2018. Between 2017 and 2018, there was a slight increase of 2.8%, from 437 new students in 2017 to 450 in 2018. The growth became more pronounced in 2019, with new enrollments rising by 14.7%, from 450 students in 2018 to 528 in 2019.



Source: UNUJA Database and Simkopta Kopertais Region IV

Figure 6. Number of New Students at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) UNUJA Probolinggo, 2016–2024

At Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo, student enrollment at the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) notably increased by 19.4% in 2017, coinciding with the institution’s transformation into UNUJA—from 488 students in 2016 to 606 students in 2017. However, in 2018, enrollments slightly declined by 6.7% (a reduction of 41 students). A significant recovery was observed in 2019, with enrollments increasing by 26.1%, reaching 765 students. Between 2020 and 2023, enrollment figures fluctuated moderately, maintaining an annual average of around 500 new students.

These enrollment increases signify one critical indicator of the positive impact of institutional transformation in *pesantren*-based Islamic universities. The institutional shift from Institutes to comprehensive Universities reflects strategic organizational policies aimed at achieving collective institutional goals. In addition to enrollment growth, institutional transformations positively influenced several key areas, including improvements in institutional governance, enhanced educational infrastructure, increased quantity and qualification of academic staff, and refined implementation of higher education curricula.

In short, both Universitas Hasyim Asy’ari Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Probolinggo experienced positive impacts from their institutional transformations, notably in enhanced academic quality and increased competitiveness on a global educational scale. One of the indicator of success is the growth in new student enrollments after restructuring, Enrollment at UNHASY increased consistently from 2017 to 2019, with a 14.7% growth in 2019, while UNUJA saw a sharp 19.4% increase in 2017 post-transformation, despite some fluctuations later. These enrollment trends is a success indicator of institutional transformation. Besides enrollment growth, transformations led to improved governance, better infrastructure, a larger and more qualified academic staff, and refined curricula, collectively fostering a stronger institutional profile and sustainability.

Table 4. Comparison of Institutional Reforms in UNHASY and UNUJA

| Aspect | UNHASY details | UNUJA details |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Transformation Process | Institutional restructuring from Institute to Comprehensive University through consensus building, feasibility studies, documentation, and merger. | Similar process with feasibility studies and stakeholder consensus leading to institutional merger and expansion. |
| Enrollment Growth Trend | Steady increase in FAI new students: +2.8% (2017-18), +14.7% (2018-19). | Initial sharp rise: +19.4% in 2017, slight drop (-6.7%) in 2018, then recovery (+26.1%) in 2019; moderate fluctuations afterward. |

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Impact on Academic Quality | Enhanced academic standards due to broader study programs and improved curricula. | Improved educational quality through expanded programs and refined curricula. |
| Competitiveness | Increased global competitiveness as a comprehensive university, attracting more students. | Improved competitiveness evident from enrollment surges and sustained student interest. |
| Stakeholder Concerns Addressed | Initial stakeholder worries about non-religious programs reducing traditional Islamic studies interest were mitigated by enrollment growth. | Similar concerns alleviated by enrollment trends and program diversification. |
| Governance Improvements | Strengthened governance structures and more organized institutional management. | Enhanced governance practices and integration of new institutional policies. |
| Resource Mobilization | Mobilized resources for infrastructure development and academic staff enhancement. | Similar mobilization of resources for infrastructure and academic staff qualifications. |
| Organizational Dynamics | Managed group dynamics during mergers with differing stakeholder perspectives. | Addressed organizational adjustments and stakeholder negotiation through consensus. |
| Sustainability Outlook | Positive outlook with improved infrastructure, staffing, curricula, and student intake. | Sustained growth supported by strategic policies and institutional reforms. |

Discussion

Explaining Change: from Theology to Positivism of Change

In explaining change at the two researched universities in this paper, we employed Auguste Comte's framework of social change can work to frame stages of change. According to Comte, human thought evolves from theological to metaphysical and ultimately to positivist modes. In the theological stage, societies explain phenomena through supernatural and divine forces (Comte, 2009). This phase is succeeded by the metaphysical stage, where abstract reasoning replaces direct religious explanations (Raphael, 1970). Finally, the positivist stage commits to an empirical and scientific approach for understanding social phenomena, discarding metaphysical and theological insights in favor of observable, measurable data (Comte, 2009). This evolution reflects Comte's belief that human progress is inherently linked to a gradual shift from mythological interpretations towards a rational, scientific framework, thereby underlining the structured nature of societal transformation (Anuhgra, 2024).

The methodological approach of this study involved a comparative analysis between the two institutions mentioned above, UNHASY and UNUJA. The data gathered demonstrate three primary motivating factors driving institutional changes: (1) global competition and market demands, (2) strengthening Islamic values and pesantren traditions, and (3) improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness in managing higher education institutions. These factors clearly illustrate how pesantren-based institutions actively respond to external pressures by strategically aligning their internal organizational structures and curricular offerings to meet contemporary educational demands.

The findings of this research provide clarity in addressing the initial formulation of the problem regarding factors that encourage organizational change within *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions. Using the Comte's framework for social change, initially focused on purely religious education (theological), *pesantren* institutions have started adapting to rapid global social changes by incorporating modern higher education systems, including non-religious study programs. Next, in metaphysical phase, abstract and philosophical values are combined with attempts to reform organizational structures and curricula. In this matter, global competition and global market have been the driven force for *pesantren* institutions to adapt by establishing modern higher education systems to remain competitive. This adaptation is evidenced by the emergence of *pesantren*-based universities, including the transformation observed in institutions such as Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari (UNHASY) in Tebuireng, Jombang, and Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA) in Paiton, Probolinggo. These institutions have expanded their educational scope by offering a variety of non-religious study programs alongside traditional religious curricula, reflecting a conscious effort

towards academic integration that combines religious knowledge with contemporary scientific and technological advancements.

Interpreting these findings, it can be argued that *pesantren*-based universities seek not merely to survive but also to thrive amid intense global competition. Their proactive adaptations—such as establishing non-religious programs, i.e. in science and technology—are clear indicators of their commitment to becoming active agents rather than passive spectators in the educational landscape. This also reflects the positivist emphasis on empirical knowledge and technology. This aligns with the perspective that *pesantren* continually evolve by adapting to the prevailing social, political, and cultural dynamics around them (Hanafi et al., 2021; Rahman & Asrohah, 2022; Ramli et al., 2019). Consequently, *pesantren* institutions exhibit resilience and flexibility, carefully balancing the retention of essential traditional values while simultaneously embracing necessary innovations and reforms.

The findings from UNHASY and UNUJA also suggest possible theoretical implications, notably the emergence or modification of existing theories regarding organizational adaptation within Islamic educational contexts. The transformation observed within these institutions signifies an evolving understanding of Islamic educational theories, emphasizing a model of education that harmoniously integrates traditional Islamic principles and contemporary educational methodologies.

Theoretical Examination: Institutional Incremental Change

The research findings indicate that organizational changes within *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education institutions involve a systematic and multi-stage process. Prior to submitting any institutional transformation proposals, the universities under study—Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari (UNHASY) Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA) Probolinggo—first fulfilled several foundational requirements. These include preparing a feasibility study, developing proposals for the establishment of new study programs, and obtaining official recommendations from the Higher Education Service Institution (Lembaga Layanan Pendidikan Tinggi/LLDIKTI) corresponding to their respective regional jurisdictions. Generally, the institutional transformation process in these two universities encompasses three significant stages: building internal consensus, preparing detailed documentation for institutional change, and executing organizational mergers under a unified foundation structure.

This staged approach aligns closely with the Burnes' incremental change model (Burnes, 2004, 2019). According to Burnes, incremental change is characterized by gradual and continual adjustments rather than radical or sudden shifts. This approach helps minimize resistance and organizational instability by allowing sufficient time for detailed assessments of internal conditions and external market demands. Incremental changes enable institutions to systematically analyze their readiness, conduct thorough preparations, and refine each transformation stage continuously, thereby enhancing the stability and effectiveness of organizational transitions.

The choice to implement changes gradually and systematically within UNHASY and UNUJA reflects careful consideration of prevailing regulatory requirements, internal organizational conditions, and responsiveness to external market needs. By adopting a thoughtful and measured transformation approach, these *pesantren*-based institutions aim to achieve clearly articulated organizational goals, secure stakeholder support and participation, and significantly mitigate potential risks associated with organizational restructuring.

Furthermore, the transformation processes observed in UNHASY and UNUJA are coherent with Lewin's three-stage model of organizational change: unfreezing, moving, and freezing (Burnes, 2004, 2019; Parra, 2021). The unfreezing stage, characterized by building awareness and consensus around the necessity for change, was clearly identifiable in both institutions. In the context of UNHASY, the unfreezing stage took place during the transitional period between its establishment as a university in 2013 and the official institutional merger of Institut Keislaman Hasyim Asy'ari (IKAHA) with UNHASY in 2018. Similarly, at UNUJA, the unfreezing stage emerged within the five years preceding the institutional merger in 2017, combining three separate institutions—Institut Agama Islam Nurul Jadid, STKIS Nurul Jadid, and STT Nurul Jadid—into a

single comprehensive university. During this critical phase, both institutions experienced significant internal group dynamics and dialogues, ultimately resulting in a shared understanding of the urgency and rationale behind transforming their institutional structures.

The subsequent moving stage involved actively implementing the intended institutional changes. For UNHASY and UNUJA, this began formally when their institutional transformations from institutes into universities were officially enacted. Such transformations included structural reorganizations, notably merging and restructuring faculties to form integrated academic entities, such as the Faculty of Islamic Studies (Fakultas Agama Islam/FAI). This stage also involved developing and implementing new organizational regulations, such as revised university statutes, master development plans, strategic planning documents, and comprehensive annual programs.

The final stage, freezing, required stabilizing and embedding the implemented changes into the broader organizational culture. At UNHASY and UNUJA, this stage was characterized by strategic human resource management aimed at enhancing institutional performance and effectiveness. Both universities prioritized collective commitment to institutional objectives, teamwork reinforcement, equal career advancement opportunities, and performance-based reward systems. This process ensured that changes introduced during the moving stage became deeply integrated into daily practices and long-term organizational culture.

Additionally, this incremental and systematic process of institutional transformation aligns with Kotter's well-established eight-step model for effectively managing organizational change (Dao et al., 2021; Fernandes et al., 2021; Pollack & Pollack, 2014). Kotter emphasizes structured steps for managing change processes, highlighting the necessity of involving all organizational members and ensuring that changes are sustainably embedded into organizational culture. Consistent with Kotter's approach, UNHASY and UNUJA implemented several critical steps, including creating a sense of urgency, clearly developing and communicating a vision for institutional change, empowering employees, consolidating gains and driving continuous improvements, and embedding changes firmly into institutional culture.

In summary, the institutional transformation of pesantren-based Islamic higher education institutions observed at UNHASY and UNUJA exemplifies an incremental, multi-stage, and carefully managed process. This approach reflects theoretical insights from Burnes, Lewin, and Kotter, confirming that successful organizational transformation depends on strategic alignment with internal and external demands, structured and continuous implementation stages, effective stakeholder participation, and comprehensive integration of changes within organizational culture.

Policy Implications: from National to Institutional Policy

The research on institutional transformation of *pesantren*-based higher education at Universitas Hasyim Asy'ari Tebuireng Jombang and Universitas Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo offers practical implications for the higher education system in Indonesia. The findings reveal that institutional changes at these universities have positively impacted service quality and institutional governance, improving governance systems, educational facilities, student enrollment, faculty qualifications, and internal quality assurance. These changes serve as a reflection for similar institutions contemplating transformation, emphasizing the need to consider their unique conditions and potentials.

Any plan to change the institutional form of *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education must adhere to existing regulations to achieve its goals and minimize risks. The restructuring process follows the Ministry of Religious Affairs' regulations, which oversee Islamic higher education, while expansion into general study programs, as in these cases, requires coordination with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology that regulates general programs.

The *pesantren* foundation responsible for managing these Islamic institutions must be adequately prepared administratively, financially, in workforce, and networking to support successful transformation. Introducing science- and technology-based programs, as highlighted in

this study, demands greater resources and infrastructure. Lack of readiness in these areas can hinder each phase of change.

Institutional transformation often brings organizational dynamics and potential conflicts among groups, which is normal given structural reorganizations. Universities need to foster consensus and collaboration among stakeholders to align on the goals and steps of the transformation. Reflecting on the findings, it may take about five years to build shared understanding and synergy in overseeing the change process.

Finally, institutional transformation affects the Higher Education Database reporting structures (PDDikti). Previously under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, institutions' databases move under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology after transformation. The research found an issue of missing student data from the Islamic Faculty in both universities during this migration, highlighting the need for proactive measures to avoid administrative problems when transferring student data in similar cases.

Theoretical Implication: Values Internalization on Organizational Change

The theoretical discussion on organizational change in *pesantren*-based Islamic higher education aligns closely with Auguste Comte's law of three stages: theological, metaphysical, and positivist (Anuhgra, 2024; Comte, 2009). Initially, these institutions began from a theological stage characterized by monodisciplinary Islamic religious education. Over time, they progressed through a metaphysical transitional phase and eventually reached a positivist stage, embracing multidisciplinary, science- and technology-based academic programs. The transformation unfolded incrementally through initiation (building shared understanding), transition (introducing general study programs), and integration (merging institutions into full universities with interdisciplinary models) (Carter, Armenakis, Feild, & Mossholder, 2012; Heracleous, Wawarta, Papachroni, & Paroutis, 2023). This careful, systematic change minimizes resistance and risks, mirroring Bernard Burnes' incremental change model (Soto - Acosta, Popa, & Martinez-Conesa, 2018). The process reflects Kurt Lewin's three stages of change—unfreezing by gaining consensus, moving through restructuring, and freezing by stabilizing new organizational norms—and resonates with John Kotter's eight-step change process emphasizing vision, communication, empowerment, and cultural embedding of change (Burnes, 2019; Cummings, Bridgman, & Brown, 2015). Seen through systems theory (Powers & Fernandez, 2011; Vanderstraeten, 2019), the transformation involves interconnected institutional elements like governance, infrastructure, faculty quality, student enrollment, and curriculum working in balance to support institutional stability. Ultimately, this evolution demonstrates *pesantren* institutions' necessary adaptation to modern educational demands and globalization pressures while maintaining core traditions and values, embodying a dynamic balance between tradition and modernity.

The findings show that, while Kotter emphasizes that organizational change requires vision and strategy, values internalization is central to strengthening vision and strategy of the organization. Reflecting from Lewin's unfreezing framework, this phase requires long period compared to other phase in this case, because change in *pesantren*-based universities starts from cultural distortion to seek a new balance. Additionally, data mining from the field and the examination using multiple theoretical approaches indicates that this paper provides insightful empirical evidence to demonstrate that *pesantren*-based higher education has shifted from traditional ways of managing the institutions, i.e. driven by religious motives to develop pious personalities, into combination of religious and technocratic thinking to keep the educational institutions survive and gain market in the contemporary market.

CONCLUSION

If pesantren-based Islamic higher education institutions transform into universities by opening various interdisciplinary general study programs while simultaneously strengthening Islamic values, conducting feasibility studies, adhering to regulations and procedures, and securing support from multiple stakeholders, this will drive the enhancement of organizational resource capacity, the effectiveness of institutional governance, and ultimately improve the competitiveness of the higher education institutions. The conceptual model derived from the study illustrates institutional change as a process comprising three main phases: pre-change, the change process, and implications. Internal drivers include a desire for efficient governance improvements and commitment to uphold Islamic values, while external drivers involve global competition and market demand for quality education. Success depends on an organization's readiness to preserve Islamic values, strengthen resources through feasibility studies, comply with regulations, and garner stakeholder support. The institutional change leads to a new condition characterized by opening interdisciplinary academic programs, which positively impacts reputation by strengthening resources, optimizing governance, and increasing competitiveness. This enhanced reputation is correlated with improved satisfaction among students, partners, and the broader community. The change is incremental, aligning with Bernard Burnes' notion of gradual and continuous transformation, but is uniquely complex due to regulatory and traditional Islamic values frameworks. The design of change integrates Kurt Lewin's three stages: unfreezing (building shared awareness), moving (organizational restructuring), and freezing (stabilizing new norms). This process is dynamic, influenced by group and environmental factors, and requires strategic steps that are mindful of the institution's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

This paper argues that while organizational vision and strategy are essential for organizational change, the process of internalizing values is central in the pesantren context, which may not be found in other institutions. These findings occur because preserving the religious values and traditions of pesantren in Islamic education is the flagship of this indigenous religious education, which can be found only in Indonesia and the Malay world.

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