Strengthening Institutional Governance through Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education

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Abstract. Strategic planning is a critical instrument for enhancing governance in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia. This study explores the structure, content, and role of strategic plans within PTKIN as tools to align institutional goals with national educational policies, including the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka program and the Religious Moderation Roadmap. Utilizing qualitative document analysis, this research used SWOT and TOWS frameworks to formulate adaptive strategies that address internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats. The instrument also joined with the synthesis of many successful cases of strategic planning reported and government perspectives in many studies. The findings indicate that while PTKIN have developed comprehensive strategic plans, challenges persist in their implementation, particularly regarding monitoring, stakeholder involvement, and integration of moderate Islamic values into operational activities. The study concludes that effective strategic planning, supported by participatory processes, outcome-based indicators, and financial diversification, is essential for PTKIN to achieve sustainable institutional development and contribute meaningfully to national and global educational goals.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Governance, State Islamic Higher Education, Islamic Education, Institutional Development, Religious Moderation

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia have undergone significant transformation in response to national policy changes (Khumaini, et al., 2022), technological advancements (Nurindah, 2023), and evolving socio-religious dynamics at both global and local levels (Khoirunnisa, et. al., 2021). State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Islamic Institution), including UIN, IAIN, and STAIN, are not only tasked with producing academically competent graduates but also with serving as agents of religious moderation, the integration of knowledge, and character development for the nation (Faiz, 2022; Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2020). The transformation described in many studies explained before is possible because of the right strategic planning, proven by successful transformation in many schools and universities, and PTKINs. Strategic planning is also important in their role to adapt to the unpredictable changes the world is facing right now.

Nevertheless, PTKINs continue to face a variety of structural and cultural challenges. Structurally, many institutions struggle with suboptimal governance, low program accreditation, limited curricular innovation, and heavy dependence on government funding (Zuhdi, 2021). Culturally, there is a growing concern over their capacity to respond to contemporary issues such as religious radicalism, educational digitalization, and the globalization of values and culture (Rohman, 2021).

In this context, the Strategic Plan emerges as a vital instrument—not only in setting institutional direction and medium-term goals—but also in ensuring that all organizational units within PTKIN align their programs with coherent, measurable, and adaptive frameworks. Ideally, the strategic plan functions as a roadmap for institutional transformation, reflecting internal aspirations, addressing external challenges, and aligning with national agendas such as the Independent Learning policy, the Religious Moderation Framework, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through
Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State
Islamic Higher Education

Unfortunately, in practice, many Strategic planning documents remain normative and administrative, lacking deep strategic analysis based on reliable data and stakeholder participation. This often leads to inconsistencies between institutional vision and the implementation of annual programs, weak performance monitoring systems, and limited public accountability regarding strategic achievements (Bryson, 2018; Assegaf et. al., 2022). Thus, revisiting the role of Strategic Planning as a tool for strengthening institutional governance within PTKIN is both timely and necessary. This discussion is crucial, as the strategic plan should not be viewed merely as a bureaucratic obligation but as a genuine organizational transformation tool.

At this point, many PTKIN still struggle with the challenges in implementing strategic planning, which is recognized as essential for institutional development. While leaders are expected to plan, organize, implement, and evaluate effectively (Mohzana et. al., 2024). Many PTKIN struggle with aligning goals to current trends, utilizing resources efficiently, and adapting to change. ICT integration, curriculum innovation, and infrastructure development remain limited due to resource constraints and inconsistent leadership capacity. As a result, despite having the right frameworks, the actual execution of strategic planning in PTKIN often falls short of its potential (Sulhan & Suyatman, 2024). Within PTKIN, the transformation envisioned includes: 1) Modernizing academic and administrative systems, 2) Integrating moderate Islamic values into organizational culture, and 3) Enhancing academic competitiveness at both national and global levels.

Given this context, the purpose of this article is to explore conceptually how strategic planning can be optimized as a governance instrument for strengthening State Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia. By drawing on theoretical frameworks in strategic management and the practical challenges of higher education policy, this article aims to contribute to the development of more responsive, participatory, and sustainable governance models for Islamic higher education.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using document analysis to explore how strategic planning functions as a governance tool in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia. The primary data sources consisted of official strategic planning documents from various PTKINs (2020–2025), national policy frameworks such as the Roadmap for Religious Moderation 2020–2024 issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and guidelines on higher education governance provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Additional data were obtained from peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and academic literature on strategic management, Islamic education, and public sector governance published in the last decade to ensure conceptual relevance and contextual depth (Cresswell, 2018; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

The instruments formed with strategic management theory, such as SWOT analysis and TOWS Matrix, by David & David 2017. Then this instrument is supported by the synthesis of the successful strategic planning done in many universities and government perspectives stated in many studies. In the next phase, the analysis was conducted through a content analysis approach, involving careful reading, coding, and interpretation of textual data (Sántha & Malomsoki-Sántha, 2023; Saldana, 2013).

The analytical framework was performed based on strategic management theory—particularly SWOT analysis and the TOWS matrix (David & David, 2017)—as well as theoretical perspectives on higher education governance (Bryson, 2018) and Islamic educational policy (Faiz, 2022; Rohman, 2021). The data were analyzed in three integrated stages: identifying key elements of strategic planning documents, evaluating their alignment with national and institutional goals, and interpreting their implications for institutional governance, accountability, and sustainability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through
Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State
Islamic Higher Education

To ensure the credibility and reliability of findings, the study utilized triangulation of data sources, engaged in peer discussions with academic experts in Islamic education and public policy, and maintained a reflexive stance throughout the analytical process (Emilia, 2016). This methodology enabled a theoretically grounded and policy-relevant examination of the strategic planning practices within PTKIN and their potential to drive institutional transformation.

Results and Discussion
Results

The document analysis revealed several key features in the strategic planning of State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia.

Table 1.
Content Analysis Results

Content Analysis Results		
Keypoints 1	**Keypoints 2**	**Keypoints 3**
Most PTKIN strategic plans follow a standardized structure mandated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, incorporating vision and mission statements, national policy alignment, and references to MBKM and the Religious Moderation Roadmap.	These plans commonly include SWOT analysis to identify internal strengths and weaknesses, such as strong academic staff and limited international collaboration, as well as external opportunities and threats like digital transformation and rising conservatism.	TOWS matrices are widely used to develop strategies from SWOT findings, focusing on academic improvement, digitalization, funding diversification, and promoting religious moderation.

Institutional Compliance and Uniformity in Planning Practices

The majority of PTKIN strategic planning documents adopt a standardized structure that reflects the administrative and policy frameworks set forth by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. These documents generally include essential components such as clearly defined vision and mission statements, institutional values, long-term and medium-term strategic goals, and action plans broken down into annual targets. This structural consistency is possible because PTKIN's strategic planning is mandated to be systematic and aligned with broader national objectives. The presence of a clear strategic framework allows PTKIN to set measurable goals and provides a roadmap for decision-making, resource allocation, and institutional development over a specified planning period.

A notable feature in the strategic plans of most PTKIN is their close alignment with national education and religious development policies. The plans frequently reference the Independent Learning initiative, which emphasizes autonomy, flexibility in learning, and the promotion of interdisciplinary competencies. Furthermore, the Religious Moderation Roadmap 2020–2024 is prominently integrated. This alignment with state-level policy initiatives not only ensures relevance but also opens opportunities for institutional support, funding, and collaborative programs initiated by the Ministry.

The adherence to ministerial formats and policy guidelines also leads to a level of uniformity among PTKIN strategic plans. While this helps ensure coherence at the national level, it can also limit the space for innovation and contextual adaptation within individual institutions. Nonetheless, this uniformity helps streamline reporting and evaluation mechanisms, as PTKIN can be assessed on comparable indicators. This institutional compliance also indicates a strong top-down influence in the strategic planning culture of PTKIN, reflecting both the strengths and constraints of centralized educational governance in shaping institutional direction.

Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through
Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State
Islamic Higher Education

Common Patterns in The Use of SWOT Analysis for Strategic Diagnosis

In nearly all the strategic plans reviewed, SWOT analysis is employed as a central diagnostic tool for identifying internal and external factors that influence institutional development. The incorporation of SWOT reflects a commitment to data-informed planning, where decisions are based on a clear understanding of institutional capabilities and environmental dynamics. PTKIN needs to be able to contextualize their strategies in ways that reflect both institutional realities and external pressures, which is crucial for making realistic and achievable plans.

The SWOT analyses across PTKIN often highlight recurring internal strengths, including the presence of young, certified academic staff, strong engagement with local communities, and the provision of affordable education. These assets position PTKIN to serve as accessible and socially responsive institutions. However, notable weaknesses also persist, such as limited international collaboration, suboptimal program accreditation levels, and an overreliance on government funding as the primary financial source. These issues present structural and operational challenges (Treve, 2021) that strategic plans must confront if PTKIN are to elevate their status and competitiveness.

From an external standpoint, strategic plans frequently point to promising opportunities such as the rising demand for Islamic higher education, the national momentum toward digital transformation in learning and administration, and alignment with education reform agendas. Conversely, several threats loom large, including growing religious conservatism that may hinder efforts toward moderation, the increasing materialistic orientation among students, and intensified competition from private and international universities. Strategic awareness of these external dynamics is crucial for PTKIN leaders to formulate resilient and adaptive institutional strategies.

Application of TOWS Matrices in Strategy Formulation

Building upon the SWOT analysis, many PTKIN employ TOWS matrices as a framework for translating diagnostic findings into actionable strategies. This approach allows institutions to match internal strengths with external opportunities while also identifying how to minimize weaknesses and mitigate threats. The use of TOWS indicates a more advanced stage in strategic planning, where institutions are not only analyzing their conditions but are also proactively designing responses. This reflects a shift from reactive to strategic thinking, making it possible for PTKIN to position itself better within the competitive landscape of higher education.

The strategies outlined in PTKIN's strategic plans generally center on academic quality improvement, including curriculum reform, pedagogical enhancement, and research capacity development. There is also increasing emphasis on digital transformation, with several PTKIN planning to upgrade ICT infrastructure, develop online platforms for teaching and administration, and train staff in digital competencies. Funding diversification is a growing priority, as many PTKIN seek to reduce dependence on government budgets by developing non-governmental revenue streams such as research commercialization, alumni engagement, and industry partnerships.

A distinctive theme in PTKIN's strategic planning is the integration of religious moderation and value-based leadership as core guiding principles. These elements are not merely rhetorical but are embedded into institutional missions, academic programming, and leadership development initiatives. This emphasis reflects PTKIN's unique position as a religious higher education institution that must balance scholarly excellence with ethical and spiritual values, which is increasingly seen as a key contribution to national character-building and religious harmony.

Discussion

Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through
Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State
Islamic Higher Education

The results indicate that strategic planning has become a common practice among PTKIN, reflecting a growing awareness of the need for institutional foresight, policy alignment, and performance-based governance. The incorporation of SWOT and TOWS frameworks is particularly noteworthy, as it signals an effort to move beyond merely administrative compliance toward analytical and strategic thinking within institutional planning (Bryson, 2018). This trend aligns with global best practices in higher education governance, where strategic plans are expected to serve as dynamic tools for guiding transformation, especially with technologies (Khoirunnisa et. al., 2021), rather than static bureaucratic documents.

However, the effectiveness of these strategic plans remains uneven across institutions. While the documents are often comprehensive on paper, their implementation tends to face multiple barriers (Gkrimpizi et. al., 2023). These include insufficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the absence of dedicated strategy evaluation teams, and limited participation from key stakeholders in the planning and review processes (Bantilan et al., 2023). This gap between formulation and execution echoes previous findings in public sector management, where policy documents risk becoming symbolic rather than instrumental (Bowen, 2009).

Another critical aspect is the integration of Islamic values, particularly the principle of wasatiyyah (moderation), into the strategic objectives. Although many PTKIN include religious moderation in their mission statements, its operationalization in academic programs, student development, and faculty governance remains limited. This suggests a need to translate normative commitments into measurable indicators and institutional culture, thereby reinforcing the distinct identity and social mission of PTKIN (Faiz, 2022).

The use of SWOT analysis in PTKIN strategic planning represents a significant move toward institutional self-awareness and evidence-based decision-making. However, while the presence of young and certified academic staff and strong community ties suggests a solid human resource and social foundation, these strengths are often underutilized due to persistent structural challenges, such as weak international linkages and overdependence on government funding (Nurindah, 2023). These weaknesses limit institutional agility and global visibility, which are increasingly essential in the competitive higher education landscape.

Moreover, the identification of opportunities like the growing demand for Islamic education and digital transformation signals PTKIN's potential for adaptive growth, especially if they can align with national education reform and leverage technological change. Nonetheless, the existence of serious external threats—such as ideological polarization, consumerist student mindsets, and fierce competition from private and global institutions—poses a complex challenge (Sulhan & Suyatman, 2024; Priyambodo & Hasanah, 2021). These pressures not only test PTKIN's resilience but also underscore the need for strategic planning that is both context-sensitive and future-oriented. While the widespread use of SWOT reflects a maturing planning culture within PTKIN, the real challenge lies in how well institutions translate this analysis into actionable, contextually grounded strategies. A successful strategic plan must go beyond diagnostic exercises and foster the institutional agility, collaboration, and innovation needed to sustain relevance and excellence in a rapidly changing educational environment.

Furthermore, the dominance of state funding and the lack of financial diversification pose risks to institutional sustainability (Serafini et al., 2022). Strategic plans that fail to address alternative funding mechanisms or entrepreneurial approaches may hinder long-term resilience, especially in times of budget reallocation or financial crisis. Therefore, the inclusion of non-DIPA funding strategies—such as the development of training centers, alumni engagement, and CSR partnerships—should be emphasized as a priority in future iterations of PTKIN's strategic planning.

In summary, while strategic plans in PTKIN demonstrate increasing sophistication and alignment with national education policy, their transformative potential depends on participatory design, continuous evaluation, and a genuine commitment to Islamic values in governance practices. Strengthening these elements can help PTKIN become not only

Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through
Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State
Islamic Higher Education

academically competitive but also socially relevant and ethically grounded institutions in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

Strategic planning serves as a fundamental instrument for strengthening governance within State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia. The findings reveal that while PTKIN has adopted structured strategic plans incorporating national policies and analysis tools such as SWOT and TOWS, the real challenge lies in effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. To enhance institutional transformation, strategic plans must be dynamic, participatory, and integrated with measurable outcomes that reflect both academic excellence and Islamic values of moderation. Additionally, overcoming financial dependency on government funding through diversification strategies is critical to ensuring institutional sustainability. The successful operationalization of strategic plans will position PTKIN as an adaptive, competitive, and socially responsible institution capable of contributing meaningfully to national development and global educational discourse. Future research may focus on the empirical assessment of strategic plan implementation and its impact on PTKIN performance indicators.

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Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education

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Jumatul Hidayah et al., 2025

Strengthening Institutional Governance through
Strategic Planning: Insights from Indonesian State
Islamic Higher Education

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