
STRENGTHENING ISLAMIC EDUCATION MANAGEMENT: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND STRATEGIC CONTRIBUTIONS

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of policies, analyze decision-making mechanisms, and describe their contribution to the development strategy of the Islamic Education Management Study Program (MPI) at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai. The research used a descriptive qualitative approach. Study program leaders, lecturers, educational staff, and students were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The Miles and Huberman interactive model was used to process the data. The findings indicate that policy implementation has been incorporated in the curriculum, academic activities, research, and community service. However, limited resources have constrained its effectiveness. Decision-making is done through lecturer meetings and deliberation forums. Yet, participation is unequal due to leadership dominance and low student involvement. Consistent policy implementation and participatory decision-making have contributed significantly to the development strategy of the MPI Study Program. These efforts have strengthened curriculum alignment, enhanced lecturer competence, and expanded research and community engagement initiatives. However, their impact has not yet been optimal due to limited human resources and unequal participation in decision-making. The findings suggest that the success of the study program's development strategy depends on the integration of effective policy implementation with inclusive governance practices that ensure shared responsibility, transparency, and sustainable academic improvement.

Keywords: decision making, policy implementation, study program development

Introduction

Islamic higher education institutions play a strategic role in producing graduates who are academically competent and embody Islamic values. According to [Sjöo and Hellström \(2019\)](#). Systematic governance and structured program development are fundamental in realizing the Tri Dharma of Higher Education. This view is supported by [Rudhumbu and Elize Du Plessis \(2020\)](#), who found that well-structured institutional governance significantly improves curriculum implementation and learning quality in higher education. Furthermore, [Muthanna and Sang \(2023\)](#) emphasize that effective governance in education requires the formulation of clear and contextually appropriate policies, while [Chugh et al. \(2023\)](#) argue that the success of such governance depends on the presence of inclusive and data-driven decision-making mechanisms. Empirical studies by [Basheer et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Han et al. \(2025\)](#) also demonstrate that sustainable academic development in universities is strongly influenced by consistent policy implementation and participatory decision-making among stakeholders.

In Islamic higher education, study programs serve as the frontline units that translate institutional vision and mission into academic activities responsive to community needs. Therefore, strengthening program governance through policy innovation and participatory

decision-making is essential to ensure the sustainability and competitiveness of Islamic higher education institutions, particularly in regional contexts such as STAI Sangatta, East Kutai.

Policy implementation at the study program level is not merely enforcing formal regulations, but a comprehensive process of translating policy directives into practical actions. According to [Edwards III et al. \(2024\)](#), the effectiveness of policy implementation is influenced by four interrelated factors: communication, resources, disposition of implementers, and bureaucratic structure. Clear communication ensures that implementers well understand policy objectives; adequate resources provide the necessary means to execute them; positive disposition reflects the willingness and commitment of implementers; and an efficient bureaucratic structure facilitates coordination and accountability. In line with this, [Lim, Ahmed, and Ratten \(2022\)](#) emphasize that effective management and leadership are critical in bridging the gap between policy design and its execution, while [Ratten and Jones \(2021\)](#) underline the importance of engaging all relevant stakeholders to foster shared ownership and accountability in the implementation process. Furthermore, continuous evaluation and feedback mechanisms are essential to monitor progress and ensure the sustainability of policy outcomes over time. Within the context of Islamic higher education, these implementation principles gain additional depth when integrated with sharia-based ethical values, moral principles, and local cultural wisdom, as such alignment not only enhances the legitimacy of the policies but also ensures their acceptance and long-term impact within the academic and social community.

Decision-making mechanisms constitute a central component of effective program governance, complementing the broader policy formulation process. [Tierney \(2023\)](#) argues that decision-making lies at the heart of management, as every managerial function, planning, organizing, leading, and controlling, ultimately involves making informed choices and establishing priorities. In Islamic educational institutions, decision-making is ideally grounded in shura (deliberation), participatory engagement, and transparency, reflecting religious and ethical imperatives. [Setiawan \(2024\)](#) emphasizes that deliberation fosters collective wisdom and mutual accountability, while [Zarestky and Vilen \(2023\)](#) highlight participation as a means to empower stakeholders and improve institutional responsiveness. [Splitter et al. \(2022\)](#) stress that information transparency enhances trust and legitimacy in organizational decision processes. However, empirical studies such as those conducted by [Wermke et al. \(2022\)](#) reveal that decision-making practices in many Islamic higher education institutions remain centralized, often dominated by leadership with limited stakeholder involvement. This tendency can restrict inclusivity, reduce the diversity of perspectives, and ultimately weaken the adaptability and effectiveness of study program management. Therefore, the quality of decision-making in Islamic higher education depends on adherence to managerial principles and on the extent to which decisions embody participatory values and align with the institution's moral and cultural framework, ensuring both efficiency and legitimacy in governance outcomes.

The Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai, holds a strategic position in preparing educators, researchers, and practitioners of educational management rooted in Islamic values. According to the theoretical perspective of Islamic higher education management, the quality of an academic program is determined by the alignment between curriculum development, governance, and institutional vision ([Assegaf et al., 2022](#)). Empirically, observations conducted in September 2025 indicate that the MPI program continues to face challenges in improving curriculum relevance, research productivity, and institutional management. Previous studies have supported these observations. [Assegaf et al. \(2022\)](#) emphasize that curriculum innovation and continuous program evaluation are vital for enhancing competitiveness among Islamic higher education institutions. Meanwhile, [Suyadi et al. \(2022\)](#) argue that strengthening academic governance and leadership is critical in ensuring institutional sustainability. Complementing these findings, [Chowdhury and Alzarrad \(2025\)](#) highlight that

program development should be aligned with the evolving needs of the community and stakeholders. Based on these theoretical and empirical foundations, consistent policy implementation, supported by effective decision-making mechanisms, is urgently needed to accelerate the sustainable development of the MPI Study Program.

Effective policy implementation in higher education depends greatly on participatory governance and the active engagement of stakeholders. Theoretically, Tierney (2023) emphasizes that participatory decision-making is fundamental in building institutional trust and accountability within academic environments. Complementing this theoretical view, Basheer et al. (2025) found that the success of academic policy implementation is significantly influenced by clear stakeholder communication and the availability of adequate institutional resources. Empirical studies further support this argument. Han et al. (2025) demonstrated that the active involvement of academic communities enhances ownership of policies and increases the overall effectiveness of study programs. However, consistent with Wermke et al. (2022), the dominance of leadership in decision-making can hinder inclusivity and innovation within educational institutions. Similarly, research by Kapelela et al. (2025) and Shamba et al. (2025) revealed that even well-designed study program policies often fail when stakeholder participation is limited and hierarchical control prevails. Therefore, the sustainability of study program development in higher education relies heavily on participatory, transparent, and resource-supported governance structures.

The effectiveness of higher education governance is strongly influenced by how well policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms are executed. From a theoretical perspective, sound governance frameworks emphasize integrating communication, resource management, and participatory involvement to achieve institutional goals (Tierney, 2023). Empirical evidence reinforces this theoretical foundation. Basheer et al. (2025) demonstrated that effective policy implementation depends greatly on transparent communication and adequate resource allocation within academic institutions. Similarly, Han et al. (2025) found that participatory decision-making processes enhance program effectiveness by fostering a stronger sense of ownership among stakeholders. Conversely, Kapelela et al. (2025) and Shamba et al. (2025) identified persistent challenges, including leadership dominance and limited stakeholder participation, which often hinder the success of study program development. However, most of these studies have been conducted within the broader context of higher education institutions or urban-based settings, leaving a research gap in understanding how such mechanisms function within regional Islamic universities. The present study examines policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms in the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai, to address this gap. Using a case study approach, this research offers new insights into how study programs operating in resource-limited regions can pursue sustainable development through effective and participatory governance.

This study aims to describe the implementation of policies, analyze decision-making mechanisms, and explain their contribution to the development strategy of the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai. Accordingly, the research is guided by the following questions: How are the institutional policies of the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program implemented at STAI Sangatta? What are the mechanisms involved in decision-making within the study program's management? How do these policies and decision-making processes contribute to the overall development strategy of the MPI Study Program? Theoretically, the research is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in Islamic education management by deepening the understanding of how governance mechanisms operate within Islamic higher education contexts. In addition, it seeks to expand the academic discourse on policy implementation and participatory decision-making as integral components of sustainable institutional development. The findings are anticipated to serve as a basis for the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta to enhance its strategic planning, strengthen institutional governance,

and improve academic quality. Furthermore, the insights gained may be a reference for other Islamic higher education programs in developing transparent, participatory, and quality-oriented governance systems. Ultimately, this study is expected to bridge theoretical perspectives and practical applications, thereby supporting the advancement of effective and sustainable governance models in Islamic higher education.

Literature Review

The development of study programs in higher education cannot be separated from implementing policies and the decision-making mechanisms that support governance. These two aspects are widely recognized as strategic factors ensuring academic programs' effectiveness, responsiveness, and sustainability. These issues are even more critical for Islamic higher education institutions, such as the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai, because governance must meet academic and managerial standards and align with Islamic values, moral integrity, and community needs. Therefore, this literature review discusses four key themes: policy implementation, decision-making mechanisms, study program development strategies, and the relationship between them as the theoretical and empirical foundation for analyzing the governance of the MPI Study Program in this research.

Policy implementation

Policy implementation is a crucial stage determining whether formulated policies can be realized effectively. [Edwards III et al. \(2024\)](#) propose four key factors influencing successful implementation: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Similarly, [Sabatier and Mazmanian \(1983\)](#) stress that implementation requires clarity of policy objectives, availability of resources, and institutional commitment. [Grindle \(2017\)](#) adds that policy outcomes are also shaped by broader political, economic, and social contexts, particularly in developing countries with fragile governance structures. In higher education, [Sabatier and Weible \(2014\)](#) argue that effective implementation depends on multi-actor coordination and shared understanding among stakeholders. These theoretical perspectives underline that implementation is not merely administrative but relational and contextual.

Empirical evidence reinforces the theoretical view that the success of policy implementation in higher education depends on effective communication, sufficient resources, and participatory engagement. [Basheer et al. \(2025\)](#) found that inadequate institutional resources and weak communication networks often hinder the execution of academic policies, thereby limiting institutional effectiveness. Complementing this finding, [Han et al. \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that participatory approaches involving faculty and students significantly enhance program effectiveness by fostering a shared sense of ownership and accountability. In the specific context of Islamic higher education, these findings suggest that successful policy implementation must focus on administrative efficiency and integrate Islamic values and local cultural wisdom. Such integration ensures that policy outcomes extend beyond academic achievement toward nurturing moral integrity and holistic character development among students.

Decision-making mechanisms

Decision-making has long been considered the essence of management. [Tierney \(2023\)](#) describes management as a continuous decision-making process under limited information and bounded rationality. [Mintzberg et al. \(1976\)](#) further classify decision-making into strategic, tactical, and operational levels, each requiring different models of reasoning and participation. [Vroom and Yetton \(1973\)](#) highlight the importance of participatory decision-making, where leader and stakeholder involvement influences the quality of decisions and organizational acceptance.

In Islamic education, decision-making is ideally guided by the principle of shura, a process of deliberation that emphasizes openness, participation, and justice as a manifestation of collective responsibility (Yufriadi & Ngardi, 2025). This Islamic concept aligns with contemporary governance theories, which argue that inclusive and transparent decision-making fosters institutional trust and accountability (Azoury & Harvey, 2023). Despite these shared ideals, empirical studies reveal that higher education institutions struggle to apply such participatory principles consistently. Tierney (2023) notes that leadership dominance and hierarchical structures frequently limit open dialogue in decision-making processes. Han et al. (2025) found that limited resources and uneven power relations can reduce stakeholder participation and weaken policy outcomes. These findings indicate a persistent gap between normative ideals and institutional practice. Therefore, integrating participatory and transparent mechanisms into Islamic higher education governance is essential to address practical administrative challenges and preserve institutional integrity and embody the ethical spirit of shura in everyday decision-making.

Study program development strategy

As the smallest academic unit in higher education, study programs maintain graduate quality and shape institutional reputation. Owens et al. (2015) argue that effective program development requires adaptive organizational management guided by a strategic vision. Biggs and Tang (2003) emphasize constructive alignment between curriculum, teaching, and assessment as a key driver of program quality. Garg et al. (2015) further note that higher education development must balance academic excellence with responsiveness to societal changes and global competitiveness.

In the context of Islamic higher education, the development of study programs requires integrated strategies that combine academic improvement with ethical and societal responsibilities. Theoretically, Islamic education management emphasizes that effective institutional development must be guided by the principles of *maslahah* (public welfare), sustainability, and moral accountability to ensure that progress benefits both individuals and the wider community. Empirical studies provide strong support for this theoretical foundation. found that curriculum innovation and continuous program evaluation significantly enhance the competitiveness and quality of Islamic higher education institutions. Similarly, highlighted that aligning program development with community needs strengthens the social relevance and long-term impact of study programs. These findings suggest that the most effective strategies for study program development include curriculum renewal, faculty capacity building, research and publication enhancement, governance digitalization, and external collaboration. Therefore, integrating these initiatives with Islamic ethical values ensures that institutional progress remains holistic balancing academic excellence with moral and social accountability.

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The relationship between policy implementation, decision making, and study program development

In the governance of higher education, the relationship between policy implementation, decision-making, and study program development is a central concern that determines institutional effectiveness. Theoretically, Edwards III et al. (2024) explain that successful policy implementation relies on four interrelated factors: communication, resources, implementer disposition, and bureaucratic structure, which collectively influence how policies achieve organizational objectives. Building on this view, Tierney (2023) conceptualizes management as a continuous decision-making process in which decisions' quality, inclusivity, and transparency determine the effectiveness of policy outcomes. Grindle (2017) extends this theoretical framework by emphasizing that policy implementation cannot be separated from its broader political, social, and economic contexts, all of which shape the capacity of educational institutions to translate policies into development outcomes. These theoretical perspectives establish that decision-making is not merely an administrative function but an integral component of effective policy implementation that drives institutional growth. Therefore, in the context of study program development, particularly within Islamic higher education policy implementation, decision-making must operate synergistically. When guided by the principles of participation, transparency, and accountability, these mechanisms ensure that study programs develop in ways that are both effective and aligned with the ethical and educational missions of the institution.

Methodology

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, as outlined by Creswell (2016), to describe the implementation of policies, analyze decision-making mechanisms, and explain their contribution to the development strategy of the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai. This approach was chosen because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of complex social phenomena within their natural context, enabling an in-depth understanding of institutional dynamics and governance practices.

Research site and participants

The study was conducted in the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai, East Kalimantan. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a qualitative technique involving individuals with relevant knowledge and experience of the studied phenomenon (Patton, 2015; Creswell, 2016). This sampling method was appropriate because the study sought an in-depth understanding of policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms rather than statistical generalization. The study involved 11 informants: one program head, three lecturers, one administrative staff member, and six students. Participants were selected based on their roles, experience in academic and managerial activities, and direct involvement in policy implementation and decision-making. This composition ensured representation from managerial, academic, administrative, and student perspectives, strengthening data validity through triangulation.

Data collection

The researchers served as the primary instrument in data collection, Creswell (2016), supported by interview guides, observation checklists, and document review protocols. This role

enabled the researchers to interpret meanings and contextual nuances within the natural setting of the MPI Study Program. Semi-structured interviews explored participants' experiences and roles in policy implementation and decision-making. The interview questions were developed from the research objectives and guided by theoretical frameworks of policy implementation [Edwards III et al. \(2024\)](#), decision-making [Tierney \(2023\)](#), and study program development ([Owens et al., 2015](#)). Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent. Participatory observations were conducted during meetings, academic activities, and administrative routines to examine how policies were applied and decisions made in practice. Observation checklists adapted from [Spradley \(1980\)](#) focused on leadership roles, participation, and consistency between policy and implementation. Document analysis complemented the interviews and observations by reviewing curriculum guidelines, meeting minutes, and program reports to triangulate and validate primary data.

All research instruments were designed systematically: first, they were drafted based on the research questions and key theoretical frameworks; second, two senior lecturers in education management reviewed the instruments to assess clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness; and third, pilot testing was conducted with one lecturer and one student outside the participant group to refine wording and ensure conceptual alignment with the study aims.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using [Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña \(2014\)](#) interactive model, which involved three concurrent steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. This iterative process allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes and establish relationships between policy implementation, decision-making, and program development.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, several triangulation techniques were applied by [Lincoln and Guba \(1985\)](#). Source triangulation compared information from program heads, lecturers, staff, and students; method triangulation cross-checked data from interviews, observations, and documents; investigator triangulation involved peer review of preliminary findings to minimize researcher bias; and member checking invited participants to review interview summaries to confirm accuracy and credibility.

Findings

This section presents the results of the study in line with its three main objectives: (1) to describe policy implementation in the MPI Study Program, (2) to analyze decision-making mechanisms, and (3) to outline the contribution of both to the study program's development strategy. Findings are drawn from interviews, observations, and document analysis, and are presented thematically under the respective subheadings.

Implementation of the study program policy

Policy implementation in the MPI Study Program covers curriculum, academic activities, research, and community service. Although the program demonstrates alignment with national regulations, challenges persist in human resources, facilities, and institutional governance. Curriculum development followed national guidelines through workshops involving leaders and lecturers. A lecturer explained: "*We have revised the curriculum through workshops, but because we lack*

lecturers with specific expertise, some courses are still handled by those from different fields.” (Interview, Lecturer 2, 15/09/2025)

Observation notes confirmed that classrooms lacked adequate ICT support, limiting innovative teaching. Academic activities such as lectures, seminars, and forums are routinely conducted. However, the documentation is weak. As stated by an administrative staff member: *“Seminars and guest lectures are held regularly, but the documentation is scattered, so it’s difficult to compile our achievements systematically.”* (Interview, Staff, 18/09/2025) Research activities involving lecturers and students have increased but remain small-scale and rarely published in reputable journals. Program documents showed only three publications in Sinta-indexed journals over the past two years. Community service was relatively stronger, especially in collaboration with local schools. A student commented: *“We are often involved in teaching assistance at schools, which is useful, but we don’t see a direct link to our study program’s vision.”* (Interview, Student, 20/09/2025)

Policy implementation in the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta, East Kutai, has progressed, but faces several obstacles to human resources, infrastructure, and institutional governance. More details can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. *Implementation of the MPI Study Program Policy of STAI Sangatta, East Kutai*

| Aspect | Implementation Form | Key Obstacles/ Findings | Data source |
|---------------------|--|--|-------------|
| Curriculum | Compiled based on national regulations and university guidelines | Limited number of lecturers according to their field of expertise, inadequate facilities | Obs., Doc. |
| Academic Activities | Lectures, seminars, scientific forums run regularly | Documentation is not yet systematically arranged | Obs., Intv. |
| Research | Lecturers and students began conducting research | Small scale, minimal publications in reputable journals | Intv., Doc. |
| Community Service | Collaboration with schools and surrounding communities | Not yet integrated with the study program development vision | Obs., Intv. |

The findings indicate that policy implementation in the MPI Study Program of STAI Sangatta covers four core aspects: curriculum, academic activities, research, and community service. (1) Curriculum: The curriculum was designed per national regulations and university guidelines, developed through workshops involving program leaders and lecturers. However, the effectiveness of its implementation is constrained by the limited number of lecturers with relevant expertise and the lack of adequate learning facilities, which reduces the quality of teaching and learning. (2) Academic Activities: Teaching, seminars, and scientific forums are carried out regularly, reflecting the program’s commitment to academic development. Nevertheless, documentation of these activities is not systematically organized, which weakens the ability to record, evaluate, and showcase the program’s achievements. (3) Research: Research activities by lecturers and students have started to grow, marking progress in scholarly engagement. However, most projects remain small in scale and are rarely published in reputable journals, limiting their contribution to strengthening the program’s academic standing and visibility. (4) Community Service: Community service is relatively better implemented, particularly through collaborations with local schools and communities. However, these initiatives are not yet fully aligned with the program’s long-term development vision, resulting in limited strategic benefits for building institutional reputation.

In sum, Table 1 illustrates that while policies are formally implemented in line with regulations, their effectiveness is hindered by human resource constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and weak governance practices, such as documentation.

Decision making mechanism

Decision-making primarily occurs through lecturer meetings and deliberation forums, but is often dominated by leadership authority. Decision-making forums allow lecturers to express opinions, though leadership determines outcomes. *"We discuss openly during meetings, but usually the program head decides the final policy direction."* (Interview, Lecturer 1, 17/09/2025) Observation during a curriculum workshop confirmed this: the head summarized discussions and announced the decision without formal voting. Lecturer participation is evident in planning academic and research activities, but is limited in shaping strategic directions. Student participation is minimal, primarily in organizations or event committees. A student stated: *"We are invited when there are student activities, but in strategic decisions like curriculum or program development, we are not involved."* (Interview, Student, 21/09/2025)

Table 2. *Decision-Making Mechanism for the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta East Kutai*

| Aspect | Implementation Form | Key Obstacles/ Findings | Data source |
|-------------------------------|--|--|-------------------|
| Decision-making forum | Lecturer meetings and study program discussion forums | Discussions are ongoing, but the final decision is predominantly determined by the leadership. | Obs., Intv., Doc. |
| Lecturer participation | Involved in curriculum discussions, academics, study program development | There is room for discussion, but limited influence in the final decision. | Obs., Intv. |
| Student participation | Involved in certain forums (organizations, academic activities) | Limited involvement, no influence on strategic decisions | Intv., Doc. |
| The principle of deliberation | Walk formally in meetings and discussions | Not evenly distributed, still dominated by leaders | Obs., Intv. |

Decision-making processes in the MPI Study Program are primarily conducted through lecturer meetings and discussion forums. However, the evidence shows that the distribution of authority is uneven. (1) Decision-Making Forums: Lecturer meetings and program forums are the leading platforms for discussing curriculum, academic planning, and program development. However, program leadership typically makes final decisions, producing a predominantly top-down pattern. (2) Lecturer Participation: Lecturers are formally involved in curriculum and academic planning discussions. However, their influence on the outcomes is limited, as leadership authority prevails. (3) Student Participation: Students are engaged in organizational forums or activity-based discussions, but this participation remains symbolic. They are not given significant influence over strategic or policy-related decisions, which restricts their role to a consultative rather than a decision-making capacity. (4) Principle of Deliberation (*Shura*): While the principle of deliberation is formally acknowledged and practiced through meetings, its application is not evenly distributed among stakeholders. Leadership dominance remains the most decisive factor, reducing the inclusiveness of governance.

Overall, Table 2 demonstrates that although mechanisms for deliberation exist, the decision-making process remains leadership-centered, thereby limiting collective participation and ownership of program policies.

Contribution to study program development

Integrating policy implementation and decision-making in the MPI Study Program contributes significantly to several key areas of development, including curriculum enhancement, faculty capacity building, research strengthening, and community engagement. However, the findings reveal that these contributions remain partially effective due to inconsistent implementation and limited participatory governance. To illustrate this, the following thematic analysis summarizes the significant findings and their empirical basis.

Table 3. *Contribution to study program development*

| Theme | Empirical Findings | Supporting Evidence (Interview Excerpts) | Interpretation |
|------------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 1. Curriculum Strengthening | Policies on curriculum review have increased alignment with Islamic values and local needs, but lack of lecturer specialization limits innovation. | “Curriculum updates are guided by policy, but not all lecturers have expertise in Islamic education management.” (Lecturer 2, 18/09/2025) | Policy implementation supports alignment, yet inadequate human resources weaken academic depth. |
| 2. Faculty Development | Training programs and academic workshops have been introduced, but opportunities remain uneven across lecturers. | “Only certain lecturers are selected for training, usually those close to management.” (Lecturer 4, 20/09/2025) | Decision-making tends to be top-down, reducing collective participation and ownership. |
| 3. Research and Publication Growth | Research output has increased, but publications remain minimal and lack institutional support. | “We do more research now, but few get published because of limited funding and guidance.” (Lecturer 1, 17/09/2025) | Policy efforts have improved activity levels, yet inconsistent follow-up and support constrain impact. |
| 4. Community Engagement | Service activities build good relations with local schools, but are not fully integrated into program goals. | “Our community programs are active, but not directly linked to the study program’s strategic targets.” (Staff, 21/09/2025) | Implementation is fragmented; decisions lack strategic coordination. |
| 5. Governance and Leadership | Leadership remains centralized; participatory decision-making is limited. | “If decisions were more participatory, we could share responsibility for outcomes.” (Lecturer 3, 19/09/2025) | Leadership dominance weakens collaborative governance and policy ownership. |

The findings indicate that policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms are interdependent and collectively shape program development outcomes. Consistent policy execution enhances structural alignment and resource mobilization, while participatory decision-making fosters shared responsibility and innovation. Sustainable program development, therefore, requires harmonizing both ensuring that policies are well-designed and inclusively implemented to strengthen institutional capacity and academic quality.

Discussion***Implementation of study program policy***

Implementing policies in the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta East Kutai has generally covered four main areas: curriculum development, academic activities, research, and community

service. The curriculum has been designed based on national higher education standards and Islamic education principles. However, the findings indicate that policy implementation remains constrained by limited lecturer expertise and inadequate facilities. Several lecturers admitted that although curriculum updates occur regularly, they are often administrative and lack substantive innovation. Observational data also revealed inconsistent documentation of academic activities, reducing accountability and traceability of outcomes.

These findings align with the results of Ntorukiri et al. (2022), who found that resource limitations are a dominant barrier to effective policy implementation in Indonesian higher education. Similarly, Rudhumbu & Elize Du Plessis (2020) demonstrated that the success of curriculum implementation strongly depends on faculty competence and learning resources. In a related context, Amiruddin et al. (2024) confirmed that universities with effective policy monitoring systems achieve better curriculum alignment and academic quality improvements. Thus, although the MPI Study Program has implemented policies according to national regulations, resource constraints and weak monitoring mechanisms continue to hinder optimal outcomes. Therefore, strengthening human resources, facilities, and evaluation systems is essential to ensure that policy implementation contributes directly to academic quality and sustainable program development.

Decision-making mechanisms

Findings show that decision-making in the MPI Study Program is primarily conducted through lecturer meetings and academic deliberations, reflecting an attempt to apply the principle of *musyawarah* (consultation). However, empirical data suggest that leadership still dominates decision-making, with limited involvement of lecturers and minimal participation of students. Interviews with lecturers revealed that the head of the study program often makes decisions on curriculum changes, research priorities, and community engagement. At the same time, input from academic staff is considered but not decisive. This leadership-centric pattern tends to limit innovation and weaken collective ownership.

These results are consistent with Haque et al. (2025) and Marlia et al. (2025), who found that leadership dominance in academic decision-making reduces institutional adaptability. Conversely, Flori et al. (2025) and Yadessa et al. (2022) emphasized that participatory decision-making enhances creativity, trust, and organizational responsiveness. Studies by Pal & Mohamed (2025) and Zahiri & Sahal (2025) also showed that inclusive governance involving lecturers and students increases the effectiveness of academic policies. Accordingly, the MPI Study Program must expand participatory mechanisms by involving various stakeholders in strategic decisions to improve transparency, trust, and responsiveness to institutional challenges.

Contribution of policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms to study program development

The integrating of policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms has contributed to the MPI Study Program's development, particularly in curriculum improvement, faculty development, and community engagement. However, these contributions remain partial and inconsistent. Curriculum alignment with Islamic education values has improved, yet the limited number of qualified lecturers restricts innovation. Research activity has increased, but publication output remains low due to limited funding and institutional support. Community service activities have strengthened partnerships with local schools, but are still not fully integrated with the study program's strategic objectives. Moreover, leadership-dominated decision-making continues to hinder shared ownership and collaborative problem-solving.

Empirical evidence from Budihardjo et al. (2021) and Sukoco et al. (2021) supports these findings, showing that the synergy between consistent policy implementation and stakeholder participation enhances institutional competitiveness. Similarly, Bussu et al. (2022) and Abo-Khalil (2024) found that participatory governance improves academic quality, accountability, and the reputation of higher education institutions. Therefore, the contribution of policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms in the MPI Study Program is evident but not optimal. To strengthen sustainability, the program needs to (a) improve coordination and documentation systems, (b) enhance lecturer competence and resource provision, and (c) institutionalize participatory decision-making processes. Consistent integration of these elements will create a more adaptive, transparent, and sustainable governance structure aligned with the goals of Islamic higher education development.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the participant selection was limited to a small number of lecturers, administrators, and students within the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of all stakeholders or other Islamic higher education institutions. Second, the scope of the study focused specifically on policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms within a single study program. Consequently, the generalizability of the results to other programs or institutions with different administrative structures or cultural contexts is limited. Third, the research time frame covered only one academic year, which restricted the ability to capture long-term policy impacts or evolving patterns in decision-making processes. A longitudinal approach might provide a deeper understanding of the sustainability of governance practices. Fourth, the data collection methods, which relied primarily on interviews, observations, and document analysis, may have been influenced by respondent bias or incomplete institutional records. The absence of quantitative indicators also limited the ability to measure the direct correlation between policy implementation and study program performance outcomes. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the governance dynamics of Islamic higher education, offering a foundation for future research with broader sampling, mixed-method designs, and comparative institutional analyses.

Conclusion and Recommendations/Implications

This study concludes that implementing policies in the MPI Study Program at STAI Sangatta East Kutai has generally covered curriculum development, academic activities, research, and community service. However, the process remains constrained by limited human resources, inadequate facilities, and weak documentation systems. The decision-making mechanism has been applied through lecturer meetings and deliberative forums, yet it is still characterized by leadership dominance and limited stakeholder participation, especially from students. These conditions reduce inclusivity and weaken collective responsibility in governance. Integrating policy implementation and decision-making mechanisms has contributed to the study program's development, particularly in improving curriculum relevance, increasing research activity, and expanding community engagement. Nevertheless, the impact has not been optimal due to unbalanced participation and resource constraints. The study highlights that effective study program development requires consistent policy implementation supported by participatory decision-making. Strengthening these two interrelated aspects will enhance the program's capacity to build a more adaptive, collaborative, and sustainable governance system in Islamic higher education.

Future research should expand the scope beyond a single study program by conducting comparative studies across multiple Islamic higher education institutions to identify diverse governance practices and policy implementation models. Researchers could also adopt a longitudinal approach to examine the long-term impact of policy and decision-making reforms on

institutional development and academic quality. In addition, future studies are encouraged to employ mixed-method designs, integrating quantitative measures such as lecturer performance indicators, student satisfaction surveys, and institutional performance data to complement qualitative findings. Exploring the role of digital governance and technology-based decision-making systems in Islamic education management could also provide new insights into enhancing transparency and efficiency. Lastly, researchers may investigate the cultural and organizational factors influencing participatory decision-making in Islamic higher education to better understand how values, leadership styles, and institutional traditions shape policy outcomes.

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