



Policy Innovation and Transformation for Quality Education in State Religious Institutions at IAKN Manado

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ABSTRACT

Innovation and transformation in higher education have become strategic issues, particularly for religious institutions that are required to enhance access and quality while strengthening national and global competitiveness. This study examines the strategies of policy innovation and transformation implemented to address these challenges. Focusing on the State Christian Institute of Manado (IAKN), this study investigates institutional transformation in the domains of governance, academic development, and cultural adaptation. The objectives are threefold: (1) to assess the innovation and policy transformation strategies implemented by IAKN Manado in improving access and quality; (2) to analyze the institution's distinctive models of policy innovation; and (3) to identify policy models that may serve as frameworks for strengthening religious higher education more broadly. Employing a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observation, and literature review. The findings reveal that IAKN Manado is actively pursuing transformation into a "cyber university" to respond to digital-era demands, while simultaneously reinforcing its historical and religious role in the Sulawesi region. This transformation illustrates both opportunities and constraints. The study further highlights that effective innovation and transformation in universities under the Ministry of Religious Affairs require stronger institutional support from the government to ensure sustainability and impact.

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ABSTRAK

Inovasi dan transformasi pendidikan tinggi kini menjadi isu strategis, terutama di perguruan tinggi keagamaan yang dituntut meningkatkan akses dan kualitas sekaligus memperkuat daya saing nasional dan global. penelitian ini mengkaji strategi inovasi dan transformasi kebijakan yang dilakukan untuk menjawab tantangan tersebut. Penelitian ini, yang dilakukan di Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Manado (IAKN), berfokus pada kebijakan dan transformasi di lembaga tersebut, khususnya di bidang tata kelola, pengembangan akademik, dan adaptasi budaya akademik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk: (1) mengkaji strategi inovasi dan transformasi kebijakan yang diterapkan oleh IAKN Manado untuk mempercepat akses dan meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan; (2) menganalisis model inovasi kebijakan yang unik dan berbeda di IAKN Manado; dan (3) mengidentifikasi model kebijakan yang dapat memfasilitasi percepatan akses dan peningkatan kualitas pendidikan di perguruan tinggi keagamaan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, dengan data melalui wawancara, observasi, dan tinjauan pustaka. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa IAKN Manado sedang berupaya untuk bertransformasi menjadi 'universitas siber' sebagai respons terhadap tuntutan era digital, sekaligus memperkuat signifikansi

KATA KUNCI

Kebijakan Universitas Kristen Negeri, Reformasi perguruan tinggi Kristen negeri, Inovasi pedagogi, jaminan mutu.

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historis dan religiusnya di wilayah Sulawesi. Oleh karena itu, transformasi IAKN Manado menuju 'universitas siber' menunjukkan peluang sekaligus kendala. Selain itu, penelitian ini berimplikasi pada peningkatan inovasi dan transformasi perguruan tinggi di bawah Kementerian Agama yang membutuhkan dukungan kelembagaan dari pemerintah.

Introduction

Since the post-reform era of 1999, Indonesia has undergone major transformations across its social, political, economic, cultural, legal, and educational domains. In higher education, these reforms aimed to strengthen quality, competitiveness, and equity while fostering healthy institutional competition (Peiyang Chen, 2025; Paquette, 1998; Nichols, 2024). The rapid transformation of higher education policy has shifted its focus from expanding access to enhancing relevance (work-ready skills), governance quality, and internationalization. Empirical studies, however, show that implementation has been uneven, especially regarding financial and staffing autonomy, which has created dilemmas and coordination challenges across ministries.

A series of regulatory frameworks have shaped the higher education landscape, including Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, and Government Regulation No. 4 of 2022 on National Education Standards. These regulations provided the legal basis for strengthening institutional roles in improving educational quality (Muslimin, 2023). Currently, the Indonesian higher education system operates under three main categories of public universities: PTN-Satker (Ministry Work Units) - Institutions with the least autonomy, where revenues must be remitted to the state, PTN-BLU (Public Service Agency Universities) - Granted more autonomy in managing non-tax revenues, similar to state-owned hospitals, and PTN-BH (Autonomous Legal Entity Universities) - The highest level of autonomy, managing finances, assets, and human capital independently (dev-itjen.kemdiktisaintek.go.id, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022) accelerated digital innovation and policy transformation in teaching and learning (Dikti, 2020). As Hidayati (2019) and Schmidt (2011) note, “transformation” has become a necessity for institutional survival in rapidly changing contexts. Yet, Suprayitno (2013) and Adison (2024) highlight persistent challenges, including historical, ideological, and leadership constraints, that hinder transformation, particularly in religious higher education.

Scholarship has largely concentrated on Islamic higher education (PTKIN). Studies by Fitri (2019) emphasize the need for policy shifts to improve access, quality, and competitiveness. Nawawi and Aliyyah (2024) argue that transformation requires faculty certification, curriculum alignment with industry, transparency in assessment, and partnerships with stakeholders. Meanwhile, Al-Razi et al. (2024) and Fadlan (2023) stress visionary and inclusive paradigms, student competency, and equality in Islamic education. Despite these insights, challenges in innovation and technological adoption remain (Cahyadi, 2022).

By contrast, non-Islamic religious higher education institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA), such as Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian state universities, remain underexplored. Existing studies (e.g., Sihombing & Fatra, 2021; Simanjuntak & Usmanij, 2024) address leadership and strategic planning in Catholic and Christian higher education but do not situate these institutions within the broader transformation of Indonesia’s higher education system. Thus, innovations such as digital governance, accreditation, and curriculum diversification at Christian state universities like the State Christian Institute of Manado (IAKN Manado) remain insufficiently studied.

Studying IAKN Manado provides a unique analytical lens for examining how

national reforms in autonomy, quality assurance, and curriculum diversification are implemented in peripheral areas, non-Islamic religious higher education institutions. Located in Eastern Indonesia, IAKN Manado exemplifies the interplay between national policy and regional disparities, resource limitations, and religious diversity. This case not only highlights challenges but also demonstrates institutional innovations that contribute to Indonesia's transformation in higher education.

Furthermore, the findings provide strategic insights for the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which supervises all PTKN, including non-Islamic institutions. By analyzing IAKN Manado's initiatives, such as cyber university programs, governance reforms, and curriculum adaptation, this study offers lessons for policy formulation, including infrastructure needs, accreditation strategies, and pluralism in educational development. Ultimately, this research expands the discourse on higher education transformation beyond PTKIN, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of governance and innovation in Indonesia's religious higher education landscape.

This is essential given the institution's role as a foundation for enhancing Christian religious education services in the Sulawesi region. According to data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the following non-Islamic religious state higher education institutions exist in Indonesia:

Table 1. Non-Islamic State Institutions of Religious Higher Education.

No	Name of Higher Education	Location
1	IAKN Palangka Raya	Central Kalimantan
2	IAKN Ambon	Maluku
3	IAKN Tarutung	North Sumatra
4	IAKN Kupang	Kupang
5	IAKN Manado,	North Sulawesi
6	IAKN Toraja	South Sulawesi
7	State Institute of Protestant Christian (STAKPN) Sentani	Papua
8	State Hindu University I Gusti Bagus Sugriwa	Bali
9	State Institute of Hindu Religion Tampung Penyang	Central Kalimantan
10	State Institute of Hindu Religion Gde Pudja	West Nusa Tenggara
11	State College of Hindu Religion Mpu Kuturan	Bali
12	State College of Catholic Religion Negeri Pontianak	West Kalimantan
13	State College of Buddha Religion Sriwijaya	Banten
14	State College of Buddha Religion Raden Wijaya	Central Java

Source: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2024.

In recent decades, Indonesia's higher education system has undergone significant policy reforms aimed at improving access, governance, and quality. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, alongside the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has promoted policy transformation to strengthen institutional autonomy, quality

assurance, and international competitiveness. Within the religious higher education sector, state religious institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Negeri– PTKN) have become key actors in aligning academic development with national education standards while maintaining their distinctive religious and cultural missions. Policy innovations in accreditation, curriculum integration, digitalization, and institutional governance are reshaping the role of PTKN in contributing to Indonesia's broader agenda of quality education and human capital development, with a focus on the eastern part of Indonesia.

Existing studies on PTKN policy transformation have predominantly focused on Islamic institutions (such as UIN, IAIN, and STAIN), reflecting their larger numbers and wider networks. However, non-Islamic PTKN, such as Christian (IAKN/UKN), Catholic, Hindu, and Buddhist state religious higher education institutions, have received far less scholarly attention. These institutions face unique challenges in navigating policy transformation, particularly in striking a balance between their religious identity, academic modernization, and local socio-cultural contexts. The absence of research on these institutions creates a knowledge gap in understanding how policy innovations are implemented across diverse religious higher education landscapes in Indonesia.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview and in-depth examination of the strategies for policy transformation and innovation at non-Islamic state religious higher education institutions, specifically focusing on IAKN Manado in Indonesia. To this end, the research questions are articulated as follows: a) What are the specific strategies of innovation and policy transformation aimed at enhancing educational quality at IAKN Manado?; b) What factors necessitate the implementation of innovations and policy transformations at IAKN Manado to improve the quality of higher education?; c) What are the implications of these innovations and policy transformations for enhancing the educational quality of IAKN Manado in relation to both the institution and the broader community, particularly among Christians in Sulawesi? The responses to these research questions are expected to yield insights and new understandings that will facilitate a nuanced comprehension of effective strategies for adaptation to contemporary conditions, especially in the context of information and technology at IAKN Manado. The anticipated findings aim to catalyze change, particularly in the domain of educational quality, ultimately fostering the development of human resources that possess competitive advantages at both national and international levels. The novelty in this study focuses on the research theme of the transformation of a Christian state university, which is really discussed in various previous studies; meanwhile, this study has discussed a university in the eastern part of Indonesia.

This study posits that enhancing the global competitiveness of higher education institutions requires both policy transformation and the realization of digital transformation. Policy transformation encompasses efforts and processes aimed at instituting significant policy changes through innovation, with the overarching goal of fostering more inclusive decision-making and policy formulation. (Sabine de Graaff, 2025). Nevertheless, the process of policy transformation encounters several challenges, including access to policymaking circles, the necessity of expanding stakeholder engagement, the capacity of policymakers, and the evaluation of policy outcomes. To ensure effective policy implementation, it is essential for academics to integrate practitioners' perspectives and develop robust models, tools, and guidelines tailored for policymakers (Haddad, C.R., 2022).

In the contemporary era, higher education institutions must become more adaptive to digital technologies. Digital transformation within these institutions can enhance operational efficiency, provide flexibility, and improve educational quality, thereby equipping students with the competencies needed to navigate the challenges of Industry 4.0. Consequently, education must equip students with the knowledge and skills

necessary to master science and technology (Lamuri, 2022).

In the context of globalization, higher education is also encouraged to integrate into the market structure characterized by free and open competition, necessitating the strengthening of communication and information technology (ICT) support, along with the development of professional human resources and governance. This leads to a logical consequence: institutions are expected to produce research of international quality, enhance curriculum and teaching quality, and increase the number of international faculty and students, all of which serve as indicators of the transformation towards world-class universities. (Zulfa, 2012). Therefore, educational institutions are expected to be more open, dynamic, and globally connected. In other words, educational transformation must consider information accessibility, flexibility, collaborative and interactive learning models, and proficiency in utilizing technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) (Hasnida, 2024).

This paper will make a contribution to accelerated efforts to implement institutional transformation in a religious university. The structure of this paper will discuss the historicity of religious universities, especially at IAKN Manado, then the conception of policy transformation in higher education in Indonesia, and the next part will discuss institutional and innovation transformation that was implemented at IAKN Manado. This paper also seeks to fill the gap by analyzing how non-Islamic PTKN, especially Christian universities in North Sulawesi, interpret and implement national reform. It contributes in three main ways: firstly, empirical contribution, providing new evidence from an under-researched PTKN context, secondly, comparative contribution, by testing whether challenges noted in PTN-BH and PTKN (e.g, autonomy VS accountability MBKM execution) are mirrored or diverge in non-Islamic PTKN. Thirdly, policy contribution, generating recommendations for MoRA and institutional leaders on funding, accreditation, and program development tailored to non-Islamic PTKN realities.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine institutional transformation in religious higher education. Data were collected through direct observation within the campus environment and in-depth interviews with various stakeholders, including faculty members, structural officials (Rector, Vice Rector, Head of Research and Community Service Institute, Head of Quality Assurance, Deputy Director of Postgraduate Programs, and Program Heads), five student representatives, and participants in focus group discussions (FGDs). The field research was conducted in June 2024 at IAKN Manado. In addition to primary data, secondary data were obtained through an extensive literature review to support the analysis.

The research process consisted of three stages. The first was problem formulation, which involved identifying issues related to the transformation and innovation of educational policies for improving the quality of religious higher education in Indonesia. The second stage was data collection, carried out through fieldwork and literature review, focusing on identifying, documenting, and organizing data to address the research questions. The third stage was data categorization and analysis, which applied thematic analysis to derive key findings by systematically categorizing, interpreting, and analyzing the data.

Data analysis employed both critical and heuristic interpretative methods. The interpretative method was used to describe, explain, and elaborate on findings from field data, ensuring that insights were grounded in participants' perspectives. The heuristic method sought to uncover relationships between the data collected and the interpretations developed by the researcher, allowing for a comprehensive

understanding of institutional transformation and innovation in religious higher education.

Results and Discussion

The dynamic of IAKN Manado at a glance

IAKN Manado was established on March 5, 2018, under Presidential Regulation No. 11 of 2018 concerning the Institute of Christian Religion in Manado. Previously known as the State College of Christian Religion in Manado, it transformed into an institute based on Presidential Decree No. 81 of 2007, officially inaugurated on June 14, 2008. IAKN Manado has a vision and mission as follows: Vision: To realize Indonesian scholars with Christian civilization. Mission: To prepare outstanding scholars in Christian education, theology, arts, and socio-religious studies for a civilized society.

IAKN Manado is located at Jalan Bougenville, Tateli Satu, Pineleng, Mandolang, Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi 95661, occupying a total area of approximately 38,134 m². Currently, the institution comprises three faculties and one postgraduate program for master's and doctoral degrees. The three faculties are the Faculty of Christian Education Sciences, the Faculty of Theology, and the Faculty of Arts and Socio-Religious Sciences. The postgraduate programs include Master of Christian Religious Education, Master of Theology, Master of Pastoral Counseling, Master of Christian Educational Management, and Doctorate in Christian Religious Education. An overview of the faculties and programs at IAKN Manado is summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Faculties and Study Programs

Faculty	Study Program	Accreditation
Christian Education	Christian Education	Excellent
	Church Music Education	Good
	Christian Education Management	Good
	Christian Early Childhood Education	Good
Theology	Theology	Good
	Pastoral Counseling	Good
	Missiology and Christian Communication	Good
	Biblical Studies	Good
Arts and Religious Social Sciences	Church Music	Good
	Christian Psychology	Good
	Sociology of Religion	Good
	Cultural and Religious Tourism	Good

Table 2: Master's and Doctoral Programs

Study Program	Accreditation
Master of Christian Religious Education	Good
Master of Theology	Good
Master of Christian Education Management	Good
Master of Pastoral Counseling	Good

Doctoral Program in Christian Good
Religious Education

For the academic year 2023, the number of civil servants (ASN) educators, including PNS (Civil Servant) and PPPK (Government Employees with Work Agreements), is 93, along with 16 non-PNS lecturers. Meanwhile, the status of administrative staff, including ASN, PNS, PPPK, and PPNP (Non-Permanent Government Employees), at IAKN Manado in 2023 totals 63 individuals, comprising 41 ASN and 22 PPNP. IAKN Manado has recorded the following student enrollment numbers over the years, **see Table 3**.

Table 3: Number of students at IAKN Manado

Batch	S1	S2	S3	Number of Students
2017	560	52	33	645
2018	550	57	12	619
2019	649	72	10	731
2020	578	18	13	609
2021	567	42	17	626
2022	483	69	10	562
2023	568	116	9	693

To facilitate the teaching and learning process, IAKN Manado has established 70 lecture rooms with a total area of 1,105 m², each accommodating approximately 25 to 30 students. As a Christian religious institution, IAKN Manado aims to enhance its role and contributions to the development of human resources and the promotion of diversity in Indonesia. Since transitioning from Sekolah Tinggi Agama Kristen Manado to IAKN Manado, the institution has implemented various transformative measures. These initiatives seek to position IAKN Manado as a premier center for Christian thought and education in Indonesia, realize the vision of a Christian Cyber University, and reform institutional governance alongside educational programs, research initiatives, and community service, all directed towards achieving academic excellence.

However, the transformation of higher education institutions presents significant challenges. The overarching objective is to attain greater institutional autonomy, enabling improvements in quality and innovation to enhance competitiveness at both national and global levels. According to the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 4 of 2020, which amends Regulation No. 88 of 2014 concerning the transformation of state universities into PTN-BH, several criteria must be satisfied. These include the implementation of the Tridharma of Higher Education, adherence to principles of good governance in institutional management, compliance with minimum financial viability standards, and the fulfillment of social responsibilities while contributing to economic development.

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Nonetheless, a persistent issue is the escalating cost of education, particularly affecting students. This challenge arises from the increasing pressure on higher education institutions to secure independent funding sources, frequently leading to hikes in single tuition fees (UKT). Additionally, the burden of operational costs—including salaries for lecturers, researchers, and administrative staff—further exacerbates the financial challenges associated with educational expenditures.

The establishment of PTN-BH can be understood as the outcome of a series of regulatory changes that have drawn significant criticism, particularly regarding issues of privatization. Law No. 9 of 2009 aimed to transition BHMN (State Owned Higher Education Institutions) into BHP (Legal Entity Education Institutions). However, this attempt at privatization was ultimately annulled by the Constitutional Court through Decision No. 11-14-21-126-136/PUU-VII/2009 on March 31, 2010, resulting in state universities being reinstated under government responsibility as per Government Regulation No. 66 of 2010, which amended Government Regulation No. 17 of 2010 regarding the management and organization of education. Nevertheless, subsequent privatization efforts resumed with the enactment of Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, which introduced the PTN-BH framework. (Azis, 2021). This movement toward privatization has raised significant concerns, particularly regarding the increasing costs of education, which have become increasingly inaccessible for lower-middle-class populations, despite the fundamental premise that state universities are public institutions designed to be accessible to all societal segments. Furthermore, issues related to the liberalization of the labor force, including the employment status of non-permanent or honorary staff, pose challenges to service quality and educational effectiveness. Additionally, there are concerns that business activities, intended as alternative funding sources, may evolve into profit-driven endeavors, ultimately benefiting institutional stakeholders at the expense of students.

Both public universities and religious institutions of higher education are increasingly urged to undergo transformative processes. This development involves establishing non-religious study programs and achieving legal entity status. In the specific context of religious higher education, such transformations aim to promote religious moderation, with the overarching objective of combating radicalism, religious violence, fanaticism, intolerance, and group exclusivity. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has supported these initiatives through the issuance of Ministerial Decree No. 494 of 2022, which designates 2022 as the Year of Tolerance. This decree outlines four key indicators of religious moderation: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and acceptance of tradition (Islam, 2023). Fundamentalist religious doctrines frequently give rise to fanaticism, fostering individuals who become insular regarding the pluralistic realities surrounding them (Wattimena, 2016). Such phenomena often stem from educational practices that lack dialogic and critical engagement. Educators, whether clergy or

religious scholars, encounter difficulties when engaging in dialogue or debate with individuals who hold differing beliefs, often resulting in a firm adherence to their universally accepted faith. Consequently, it is imperative to facilitate the transformation of religious higher education institutions by integrating national values while maintaining their distinct identities (Masinambow, 2021)

According to Ministerial Regulation No. 20 of 2020 regarding the Transformation of Religious Higher Education Institutions, the transition to university status mandates specific faculty qualifications: 80 faculty members holding master's degrees, 16 holding doctoral degrees, and four holding professorial titles, as well as a student-faculty ratio of 1:40 in religious studies, with an accreditation grade of A for two programs and B for eight others. Moreover, efforts are underway to transform IAKN Ambon into Universitas Kristen Negeri (UKN), with a focus on fostering high-quality human resources, particularly in eastern Indonesia, thereby reducing local dependency on further education in Java. Challenges faced by IAKN Ambon include the establishment of faculties of science and technology, specifically in the development of architecture and industrial engineering programs, in addition to infrastructural constraints. Notably, IAKN Ambon currently occupies 8.6 hectares of land, which must meet the regulatory requirement of 10 hectares. (Sarman, 2024).

Transformation of Education Policy in Indonesia

In its strategic plan for 2020-2024, the Ministry of Religious Affairs seeks to enhance higher education institutions' capacity to generate scientific and technological advancements while establishing robust networks among universities and research institutions, both domestically and internationally. Furthermore, Kemenag promotes synergistic collaboration between higher education institutions and industry, facilitating partnerships between researchers or academics and practitioners. The ministry emphasizes the development of educational curricula that are responsive to industry demands and regional development needs, thereby fostering the emergence of young entrepreneurs. Institutions under Kemenag have been endowed with PTN-BH to enable transformative and innovative practices. Additionally, the development of human capital in higher education must encompass ethical principles, integrity, interfaith tolerance, a strong work ethic, and a commitment to community service. Education innovation policies in higher education have been widely studied and researched using various approaches. One of the approaches seen is related to the implications of educational policy innovation of increasing literacy for students. (Muh Tahir Malik, 2023).

Similarly, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) has articulated a strategic plan for 2020-2024 aimed at advancing higher education through the Merdeka Belajar initiative. This policy encompasses the establishment of new academic programs, the implementation of a comprehensive accreditation system for higher education institutions, the transition of public universities to legal entity status, and the provision for students to pursue up to three semesters of study outside their primary academic programs. These measures are designed to reformulate the paradigm of higher education toward increased autonomy and to cultivate a more innovative learning environment free from bureaucratic constraints. Consequently, higher education institutions are positioned to facilitate flexible, autonomous, and innovative educational processes. Students are granted the autonomy to select disciplines and courses that align with their aspirations and individual competencies. Moreover, Kemendikbud is dedicated to enhancing the quality of higher education to attain international standards by improving the caliber and relevance of research in alignment with industry requirements. This is accomplished by fostering knowledge and innovation that are economically viable and consistent with the imperatives of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and sustainable development. Thus,

higher education institutions are compelled to undergo transformative processes and generate innovations in response to contemporary societal challenges.

In the realm of transformation and innovation, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) issued Ministerial Regulation No. 24 of 2019 concerning Higher Education Innovation Management. This regulation outlines the framework for higher education institutions (HEIs) to engage in innovation planning through collaboration with stakeholders, including business entities and community groups. Under this framework, HEIs are expected to establish comprehensive innovation management systems that provide services such as disseminating data and information on innovation outcomes, promoting innovation achievements, utilizing research findings, issuing licenses, publishing innovations, forming innovation consortia, developing networks with industries, accessing funding, and fostering entrepreneurial incubation. Furthermore, according to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the Directorate General of Higher Education (Dirjen Dikti), the quality or standard of HEIs is evaluated based on several criteria. These include graduates securing suitable employment, students gaining experiences outside the campus, faculty members engaging in activities beyond the institution, industry practitioners teaching on campus, the societal utilization or international recognition of faculty research, study programs collaborating with world-class partners, the implementation of collaborative and participatory classes, and the adherence of study programs to international standards. These regulations collectively emphasize that high-quality HEIs must undergo continuous transformation and innovation. This involves generating intellectual property assets, establishing partnerships with industry practitioners, and developing research outputs into internationally recognized publications. Additionally, the academic achievements of students are highlighted as critical indicators of institutional excellence.

In terms of transformation and innovation, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology issued Regulation No. 24 of 2019 on Higher Education Innovation Management. This regulation outlines innovation planning in higher education through collaboration with stakeholders, including businesses and communities. It encourages universities to implement innovation management by providing data services, promoting innovations, utilizing research outcomes, issuing licenses, publishing innovations, forming innovation consortia, building networks with industries, accessing funding, and supporting entrepreneurial incubation. According to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set by the Directorate General of Higher Education, university quality is measured by factors such as graduates securing good jobs, students gaining off-campus experience, faculty participating in external activities, industry practitioners teaching on campus, faculty research being used by society or gaining international recognition, study programs partnering with global institutions, collaborative and participatory classes, and internationally accredited programs.

Meanwhile, Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 2 of 2023 on the Criteria and Procedures for Evaluating the Performance of State Religious Universities to Become Legal Entities outlines several indicators for assessing university quality. These include having reputable international journal publications, owning intellectual property rights (IPR), student academic achievements in national and international competitions, participation in government and/or regional activities, and collaborations with businesses, industries, organizations, and communities both domestically and internationally. These points highlight that high-quality universities must engage in transformation and innovation, such as producing IPR assets and building relationships with industry and business practitioners. Additionally, developing publications into internationally recognized journals is essential. Student academic achievements also serve as key indicators of institutional excellence.

The transformation of State Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKN) under the Ministry of Religious Affairs is a complex process. Minister Yaquut Cholil Qoumas acknowledged that the transition from colleges to institutes has been slow due to stringent requirements. Kemenag oversees 72 PTKN, consisting of 58 State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN), 7 State Christian Religious Higher Education Institutions, 1 State Catholic Religious Higher Education Institution, 4 State Hindu Religious Higher Education Institutions, and 2 State Buddhist Religious Higher Education Institutions. As of August 2024, 11 PTKN have successfully transitioned, including 9 State Islamic Institutes (IAIN), 1 State Islamic College (STAIN), and 1 State Hindu College (STAHN). Institutions that have transformed into universities include Universitas Islam Negeri Abdul Muthalib Sangadji Ambon, Universitas Islam Negeri Palangka Raya, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kudus, Universitas Islam Negeri Syekh Wasil Kediri, Universitas Islam Negeri Kiai Ageng Muhammad Besari, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultanah Nahrasiyah, Universitas Islam Negeri Madura, Universitas Islam Negeri Jurai Siwo, and Universitas Islam Negeri Palopo. Additionally, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Datuk Laksemana Bengkalis and Institut Agama Hindu Negeri Mpu Kuturan have transitioned from colleges to institutes. This transformation aims to align PTKN with the dynamic demands of the modern era, improve the quality of religious education, expand access and distribution, and enhance national and international competitiveness through institutional modernization.

The main goal of transforming higher education institutions into legal entities is commendable, yet privatization brings undeniable negative consequences. One of the most significant issues is the rising cost of education, making it inaccessible to lower-income groups and perpetuating educational inequality. While privatization can enhance quality through competition, when applied to higher education, it shifts education towards a market-driven mechanism, exacerbating disparities between institutions and hindering the equal distribution of educational quality in Indonesia. Additionally, the social divide between the wealthy and the poor widens, as the affluent have easier access to quality education, while the lower classes struggle to afford it. This segregation creates a hierarchy of prestigious and non-prestigious institutions, with fees reflecting this status. Ultimately, this issue could shift the mission of education from empowering society to operating like a profit-driven enterprise. Privatization fosters commercialization, altering the academic culture into an economic one, where educators adopt a merchant-like mentality, prioritizing revenue over knowledge development. Consequently, commercialization under this system further distances education from its mission to break the cycle of poverty (Daulay, 2014). Efforts to address social inequality in education, such as the single tuition system (UKT), exist, but public universities (PTN) are only required to allocate 20% of UKT to underprivileged students. In practice, PTN often struggles to meet this quota. A study by BEM UGM found that only 7.52% of the 2023 cohort received the lowest UKT category. (Yaputra, 2024).

The transformation and innovation of policies from the school to the Christian Religious Institute in Manado

Transformation generally refers to a change in form or character that promotes structural shifts. It represents an effort to adapt to dynamic environmental conditions and requires a long-term commitment involving complex factors, including risks and

uncertainties. In this context, policymakers are key actors in determining the direction and processes of the transition to ensure its success. Important factors in transformation include policy planning with specific goals, a long-term focus that distinguishes the future from the past, systematic change, risk and opportunity assessment, and innovation. The principle of policy transformation embodies a paradigm shift that is especially significant for stakeholders (Karuniasa, 2019).

The scope of policy transformation, particularly in enhancing the quality of higher education, involves a paradigm shift among stakeholders and policymakers who must adapt to changing times. This transformation encompasses the development of human resources, focusing on the competencies and capacities of decision-makers in their respective fields of expertise and experience. With capable policymakers, institutional transformation can be effectively planned and executed. Furthermore, this transformation fosters structural, institutional, and organizational changes, including decision-making processes and policy formulation that are more inclusive and transparently monitored. Moreover, the effectiveness of policy transformation is contingent upon the prior establishment of adequate infrastructure. For instance, digital transformation necessitates various supporting technologies and the human resources to implement them. All forms of innovation policy have given rise to various important aspects, namely, efficiency. However, this innovation policy has not yet touched on how quality is produced. (Rahman, 2020).

Technology, combined with competent resources, can foster innovations that serve as effective strategies for achieving transformation goals. Consequently, the condition and readiness of resources and infrastructure are crucial factors that support the successful implementation of policy transformation. Another significant aspect of policy transformation is meticulous planning, characterized by specific objectives and results-oriented targets. The success of transformation is reflected in the formulation of policies and plans that include various indicators for evaluating the change process. Comprehensive planning must also be backed by capable actors to yield beneficial outcomes for the institution's stakeholders. Since the post-reform era in Indonesia (1999), numerous institutional transformations have occurred, particularly in educational institutions, such as the transition of the Institute of Teacher Training and Education (IKIP) into a university and the transformation of IAIN into State Islamic Universities (UIN). These changes have brought about significant reforms in institutional governance, human resources, budgeting, and academic innovation.

The transformation process is undoubtedly challenging. (Butler, 2024), as it must confront various obstacles, including issues related to technology utilization, the availability of digital infrastructure, the competency of human resources, and government support (Kambau, A.R., 2024). Moreover, the accessibility of information and technology for the younger generation raises ethical and security implications, such as the risks of personal data breaches and cybersecurity threats. Key elements in policy transformation include targets that align with social objectives, social and geographic inclusivity, particularly concerning marginalized communities, public engagement in policymaking, monitoring progress, and fostering diverse collaborations among stakeholders from various backgrounds. (Christian Maroy, 2021). Additionally, effective policy implementation must consider the condition and readiness of the community, which are vital supporting factors. (Calderini, 2023)

Educational policy transformation and innovation are unavoidable processes driven by societal changes and increasingly complex challenges. (Huong Lan Nguyen, 2025); (Hongda Lin, 2019). These shifts necessitate a change in mindset and the ability to respond to current societal needs (Lanting Wang, 2024). Research conducted by IAKN Manado highlights its innovations in learning technology, program development, and

management and academic strategies aimed at providing the community with access to high-quality religious education.

The challenges of transformation and innovation at IAKN Manado encompass both internal and external factors. Internal challenges include inadequate human resources and qualifications that do not meet current regulatory standards, limited infrastructure supporting the *tri dharma* of higher education, and insufficient educational funding. Conversely, external challenges involve government regulations and policies that do not favor IAKN in Indonesia, posing additional obstacles to the ongoing transformation and innovation processes.

In the context of Islamic higher education, graduates are often perceived as less employable in the broader labor market, with the belief that they can only fill positions within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and related institutions, such as madrasahs. To address this issue, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) encourages Islamic higher education institutions to transform in accordance with contemporary conditions and labor market demands. (Paola Mattei, 2023). Additionally, challenges such as inadequate facilities compared to public universities and a scarcity of human resources, particularly in terms of lecturers with doctoral degrees and professorships, persist. Therefore, through Ministerial Regulation No. 15 of 2014 concerning the transformation of religious higher education institutions, the Ministry of Religious Affairs promotes the transformation of PTKIN to enhance competitiveness and quality by expanding relevant fields of study in line with current situations and increasing their influence and contributions, particularly in scientific knowledge. (Abdul Hayyi Akrom, 2017).

The innovation and policy transformation strategies implemented at IAKN Manado, a religious higher education institution in Eastern Indonesia, have shown significant progress. Since its institutional transformation from a Christian theological school to the State Institute of Christian Religion in Manado, various innovations aimed at enhancing educational quality have been directed towards the institutional and *Tri Dharma* aspects. In the institutional aspect, IAKN Manado experienced changes in status and structure. In terms of structure, IAKN Manado has a more complex organization with additional faculties and study programs, led by the Dean. In the administrative sector, the General Academic and Students' Affairs Administration Bureau (AUAK) was also established, which is led by the Head of the Academic and Student Affairs Administration. There are additional study programs with more diverse majors that have been developed in IAKN Manado. For example, in the undergraduate program, there are eight additional study programs from the previous 4 study programs. Then, in the postgraduate program, two additional study programs are added to the previous 3 study programs. So the total study programs at IAKN Manado to date is 17. Since the transformation from school to institute, IAKN Manado is carrying out a program to increase academic performance.

Firstly, the introduction of social science-based study programs and more general programs has increased institutional inclusivity in student recruitment, with plans to propose new formal science programs by 2024. Secondly, research and collaboration efforts are being enhanced to secure funding from both internal and external sources, including intensive partnerships with international institutions. Many lecturers from IAKN Manado are pursuing advanced studies abroad and in other regions. Community service initiatives are also fostering collaboration among different religious higher education institutions to engage in cross-institutional community outreach. Given the sociocultural context of Manado, where the majority of the population is Christian, IAKN Manado is motivated to innovate and transform its policies to improve educational quality and provide opportunities for the local community and youth in North Sulawesi to access quality knowledge and religious education. Here is an overview of key innovations and policy transformations observed at Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Manado, North

Sulawesi, focusing on digital transformation, governance reforms, and curriculum diversification planning. On digital transformation shows that IAKN Manado has been designated as a pilot for a “Cyber Christian University,” an entirely online, distance learning model based on the system used at Indonesia’s Universitas Terbuka. This stems from a formal Minister of Religion decree recognizing the institute as the first state Christian campus to adopt fully online education (Sasuwuk, 2023; Olivia Cherly Wuwung, 2024).

At the governance reform show that IAKN Manado is structured according to the Ministry of Religion Regulation No.17 of 2018, which defines its organization and work procedures. It enables the university to have more flexible administrative structures needed for online operations. Further signals institutional reform in areas such as decision-making, quality assurance, and academic oversight are being re-engineered for a cyber environment. These reforms are directly connected to the SPMI (Internal Quality Assurance System) policy documents produced by IAKN’s postgraduate office, which detail the standards and procedures that must be adapted to support both conventional and distance modes. (Manado, 2023), in addition, policy innovation and transformation in Curriculum diversification at IAKN Manado show competency standards, quality assurance mandates, and curriculum adaptation and expansion at the department and faculty levels. (Olivia Cherly Wuwung, 2024). In summary, this study shows that the policy transformation at IAKN Manado consists of a pioneering cyber Christian university, updating its organizational governance through ministerial regulation and internal quality systems to support digital operations, and driving curriculum diversification both technologically and academically.

The implications of innovation and policy transformation at IAKN Manado in enhancing educational quality position it as a leading pioneer in developing knowledge and strategic studies in religious education, particularly Christian education, in Eastern Indonesia and across the country. Ultimately, research findings indicate that the innovations and policy transformations undertaken by IAKN Manado have undergone significant dynamics and changes. These dynamics arose from the transition of its status from a Christian theological school to a Christian religious institute, while the changes have been directed towards institutional restructuring, academic management improvements, and advancements in the Tri Dharma of higher education.

Conclusion

The case of IAKN Manado expands the academic discourse on the transformation of religious higher education in Indonesia, particularly within Christian institutions. While much of the existing literature has concentrated on Islamic higher education (PTKIN), this study highlights how a state Christian university engages with digital transformation, governance reforms, and curriculum diversification. The initiatives at IAKN Manado—such as the cyber university program, new quality assurance mechanisms, and broadened academic offerings—demonstrate that Christian higher education can pursue modernization in ways comparable to, yet distinct from, other PTKN. This enriches comparative perspectives on how diverse faith-based institutions adapt to global trends in higher education and contribute to the broader agenda of religious education reform.

At the institutional and policy levels, the study underscores the importance of governance, leadership, and innovation in accelerating both quality and equity in Indonesian higher education. The diversity of institutional types and governance styles across PTKN shapes how policies are translated into practice, revealing challenges that remain unresolved. Findings indicate that many religious universities, including IAKN Manado, continue to face fundamental issues, such as minority inclusion, human resource

capacity, and financial constraints. These challenges highlight the uneven progress of institutional transformation and suggest that more comprehensive policy support is needed. The case study provides empirical evidence and strategic insights for the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), particularly in addressing infrastructure gaps, capacity building, and accreditation challenges, while also fostering pluralism and innovation across all PTKN traditions.

Despite these contributions, this research is limited by its focus on a single Christian state university, which restricts the generalizability of findings. Future studies should broaden the scope to include other non-Islamic religious universities, enabling cross-case comparisons that capture the varied trajectories of institutional transformation across traditions. Such research would deepen understanding of how governance reforms, digital innovations, and curriculum adaptation contribute to educational modernization in Indonesia's diverse higher education landscape.

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