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The transformation of state islamic higher education institutions into World-Class University: From globalisation to institutional values

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A B S T R A C T

The competition among alumni in the job market has driven universities worldwide to strive for the title of World Class University (WCU). In Indonesia, some public and private universities have entered the global rankings. However, only two State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (SIHEI) have entered the world rankings. Various efforts have been made to achieve internationalisation, but these efforts are hindered by institutional and financial management autonomy. This study aims to analyze the strategies adopted by SIHEI to achieve World-Class University (WCU) status and investigate how the incorporation of institutional values can mitigate the negative impacts of internationalisation. This article is based on qualitative research using a descriptive approach. Research data were obtained from secondary sources and interview with authoritative figures. The findings indicate that SIHEI must transform into State Universities with Legal Entity Status (SULES) to overcome the challenges of achieving WCU status. This transformation should be accompanied by local values to mitigate negative effects, such as the commercialisation of education and the erosion of educational values. Universitas Islam Negeri Malang has integrated institutional values into their academic and non-academic management. These values play a crucial role in enhancing the spirituality, morality, and integrity of their academic communities.

1. Introduction

The competition among universities worldwide has become increasingly intense over the past decade (Krücken, 2021; Musselin, 2018). There are two main drivers of this competition: the opportunity for alumni to secure employment and the influence of higher education on the industrial sector (Deem et al., 2008; Nogales et al., 2020). Competition among universities is also reflected in their success in entering global ranking systems (Brankovic et al., 2018). University rankings are used as indicators of academic quality and research innovation. Rankings also impact a university's ability to attract students, faculty, and global funding (Erkkilä & Piironen, 2020; Garcia-Alvarez-Coque et al., 2021). Two major online platforms commonly used by the public to access global university rankings are the QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education. The absence of universities from global rankings results in a loss of opportunities to showcase their achievements and innovations on the international stage (De la Poza et al., 2021)

Competition at the global level has also been embraced by universities in Indonesia. Through internationalisation programs, Indonesian higher education institutions are striving to be included in global ranking systems (Sukoco et al., 2021). The government consistently encourages universities in Indonesia to achieve recognition in the QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education rankings. This initiative is evident through efforts to enhance research quality, teaching standards, scientific publications, and international collaborations (Napitupulu, 2023). Although several universities have successfully secured positions in international rankings, the majority still face challenges in maintaining quality standards in line with global benchmarks. The increasingly competitive global environment has also attracted the attention of State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (SIHEI) in Indonesia. The Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, as the authority responsible for Islamic higher education, is committed to strengthening the global reputation of SIHEI. One of the key strategies includes promoting research that addresses the needs of the global community (Kementerian Agama RI, 2024b).

There are two main reasons for the inclusion of SIHEI in the global competition framework. First, SIHEI seeks to demonstrate its ability to

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compete with major universities worldwide. SIHEI is not an inferior type of institution. It aims to counter public perceptions that categorize religious higher education institutions as second-class. Currently, only a few religious universities are recognized at the global level. In general, public universities (PU) are more favored by prospective students than SIHEI. Although the study programs offered are relatively similar, factors such as educational facilities, scholarship opportunities, professional networks, and international collaborations influence students' preferences toward PU over SIHEI in Indonesia (Rahayu, 2024). Second, SIHEI, as a representative of Islamic scholarship, endeavors to disseminate the concept of Islam *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (a mercy to the universe) and to promote the values of moderate Islam (Kementerian, 2021). The experience of Islamic life in Indonesia offers an important antithesis to the negative stigma associated with Islam following the terrorist attacks of 2001.

The efforts of SIHEI to compete globally are hindered by two main challenges: the lack of institutional management autonomy and limited financial resources (Kusumaputri et al., 2021; Sibawaihi et al., 2024). SIHEI institutions have not been granted autonomy because they operate as Public Service Agencies (PSA) or Work Units under the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia. In contrast, management autonomy has largely been granted to public universities (PU) under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Adam, 2024). As a solution, SIHEI institutions must transform into State Universities with Legal Entity Status (SULES). Universities with SULES status are granted the autonomy to manage their institutions independently, including the authority to open and close study programs based on market needs, flexibly recruit professional academic staff, and manage their finances independently (Sibawaihi & Fernandes, 2023; Suyadi et al., 2022). The quality of services provided by SULES institutions tends to improve significantly. Furthermore, SULES universities are expected to implement international-standard quality management systems, such as ISO (International Organization for Standardization) and FIBAA (Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation).

Although State Universities with Legal Entity Status (SULES) offer several advantages, they also face a number of challenges, including the need for strong and sustainable funding and the risk of widening the gap in access to education for underprivileged communities. Additionally, there is a concern that the moral values traditionally upheld in education may be increasingly replaced by transactional values. To address challenges in implementing the SULES system at SIHEI, the institutional value of *Ulul Albab*, developed by Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, plays a key role in shaping campus policies—particularly student tuition. This values are embodied in philanthropic and community service programs, guiding SIHEI's transformation toward SULES Status in a safer and more strategic manner. More than a guiding principle, *Ulul Albab* serves as a foundational pillar for systemic changes aimed at enhancing institutional quality and competitiveness.

This article argues that granting SULES status can accelerate SIHEI's progress toward becoming a world-class university. SULES status provides universities with the authority and flexibility to independently manage financial and institutional resources. However, SULES governance must be adapted to include institutional values to mitigate the negative impacts of higher education privatisation. This study aims to analyze the strategies adopted by SIHEI to achieve World-Class University (WCU) status and investigate how the incorporation of institutional values can mitigate the negative impacts of internationalisation. This study is guided by the following questions: 1) How does SULES status influence SIHEI efforts toward becoming WCU?; 2) How can institutional values such as *Ulul Albab* mitigate the unintended consequences of internationalisation? To address these questions, this paper first outlines the theoretical framework on higher education governance. It then presents findings from two case studies, followed by a discussion on implications for SIHEI policy.

2. Methods

2.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the strategic efforts of SIHEI in pursuing World Class University (WCU) status. A qualitative approach was selected to gain in-depth, contextual understanding from key informants directly involved in the internationalisation process.

2.2. Participants and sampling

Data were obtained from 9 key informants affiliated with Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The interviewees included.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their involvement and expertise in designing and implementing internationalisation strategies at the university. Informants were selected based on their: (1) Leadership positions; (2) Strategic roles in academic, financial, and internationalisation planning; and (3) Direct engagement with the implementation of Ulul Albab institutional values.

2.3. Data collection

This study utilized both primary and secondary data sources to ensure data triangulation and strengthen the trustworthiness of findings. Primary data were collected through in-depth interview, conducted in person and via online platforms (Zoom), depending on availability. All interviews with informants were conducted entirely in the Indonesian language to ensure clarity and comfort for the participants. The interview guide, however, had been previously translated into English to maintain consistency with the research framework and facilitate review process. The interview was guided by protocol covering key themes such as.

1. Perceptions of World-Class University (WCU) indicators.
2. Institutional strategies for internationalisation.
3. Challenges related to institutional and financial autonomy.
4. Integration and operationalization of Ulul Albab institutional values.
5. Mitigation strategies for risks of educational commercialisation.

Secondary data included institutional documents such as.

1. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim's Strategic Plan
2. Academic policy documents
3. Internal quality assurance reports
4. Annual reports
5. Documents relating to accreditation and internationalisation programs
6. Official websites and performance reports of Indonesian SULES universities.

All participants provided written informed consent, and ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang (Approval No. 1599/LP2M/TL.April 00, 2023).

2.4. Data analysis

Data were analyzed thematically using NVivo software to assist in managing, coding, and identifying recurring patterns in the interview and documentary data. Thematic analysis was guided by the six-step framework of Braun and Clarke, involving familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final analysis. Both inductive and deductive approaches were used, grounded in the conceptual

frameworks of World Class University (WCU) and Local Value. The interview transcripts were imported into NVivo and systematically coded. Nodes were created based on the key themes identified from both the literature and the data itself. Two overarching parent nodes were developed: World Class University (WCU) and Local Value. Each of these included sub-nodes. For WCU: International Collaboration, Research Excellence, Academic Reputation, Governance and Autonomy, and Funding and Infrastructure; for Institutional Value: Integration of Islamic Identity, Cultural Adaptation, Ethical Leadership, and Local Community Engagement.

Thematic codes were assigned across multiple sources. For instance, a response from the Vice Rector for Cooperation mentioning dual-degree programs with a South Korean university was coded under International Collaboration and Integration of Islamic Identity, indicating the intersection between global strategy and religious-cultural values. Another informant from the research institute (LP2M) emphasized that most international publications are derived from local case studies—this was coded under Research Excellence and Local Community Engagement.

To synthesize thematic patterns across participants, a matrix coding query was conducted. This allowed the comparison of theme coverage by different stakeholder roles, as shown below.

The matrix reveals that both administrative leaders and academic staff consistently emphasized the dual commitment to global competitiveness and Islamic-Institutional identity. NVivo's visual tools, such as word frequency queries and word clouds, further supported the identification of recurring terms like "collaboration," "Islamic," "research," and "values," highlighting the key focus areas in the internationalisation discourse at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim.

2.5. Data triangulation

This Research used source triangulation to ensure the validity and reliability of the collected data (Rahim et al., 2008, p. 11; Robin, 2024, p. 351). This involved comparing information obtained from informants in Table 1 This method to identify consistent patterns or differing perspectives. This step is essential for gaining a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon. In addition, the researcher cross-checked interview results with available secondary data, such as official documents, institutional reports, and policy archives, to strengthen the findings and minimize subjective bias. Through this approach, data validity is enhanced, resulting in more credible and scientifically accountable research outcomes (see Table 2).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Internationalisation of SIHEI to achieve international status

The internationalisation of SIHEI is an effort to enhance their competitiveness and contributions in the global context. This process involves strengthening institutional capacity, fostering international collaboration, improving academic quality, and aligning with global

Table 1
Informants name and their position.

No	Name	Position Level
1	Informant 1	The Rector
2	Informant 2	The Vice Rectors for Academic Affairs
3	Informant 3	The Vice Rectors for Finance Affairs
4	Informant 4	The Vice Rectors for Cooperation Affairs
5	Informant 5	The Head of the Institute for Research and Community Service
6	Informant 6	The Head of Institutional Quality Assurance
7	Informant 7	The Director *of Ma'had Al-Jamiah*
8	Informant 8	Director Project Manajemen Unit
9	Informant 9	Student/El-Zawa's Scholarship Nominee
10	Informant 10	Derector of El-Zawa
11	Informant 11	Senior Lecturer/Qaryah Thayyibah Fasilitator

Table 2
Coding query by different stakeholder roles.

Theme	Rector	Vice Rectors	LPM	LPPM	Lecturers	Students
International Collaboration	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Integration of Islamic Identity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research Excellence		✓		✓	✓	✓
Local Community Engagement				✓	✓	✓

Table 3
QS world university rankings for public universities in Indonesia 2022–2025.

No	University	Rank 2022	Rank 2023	Rank 2024	Rank 2025
1	Universitas Indonesia	254	231	237	206
2	Universitas Gadjah Mada	290	235	263	239
3	Institut Teknologi Bandung	303	248	281	256
4	Universitas Airlangga	465	369	345	308
5	Institut Pertanian Bogor	511–520	449	489	426
6	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember	751–800	701–750	621–630	585
7	Universitas Padjajaran	801–1000	751–800	661–670	596
8	Universitas Diponegoro	1001–1200	801–1000	791–800	721–730
9	Universitas Brawijaya	1001–1200	801–1000	801–850	801–850
10	Universitas Hasanuddin	1001–1200	1001–1200	1001–1200	1001–1200

Source: (*QS* World University Rankings 2025, 2025)

Table 4
QS world university rankings for public universities in Indonesia for Asia region 2023–2025

No	University	Rank 2023	Rank 2024	Rank 2025
1	Universitas Indonesia	49	48	46
	Universitas Airlangga	56	54	52
2	Universitas Gadjah Mada	63	60	53
3	Institut Teknologi Bandung	81	67	59
5	Institut Pertanian Bogor	112	106	92
6	Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember	146	128	114
7	Universitas Padjajaran	191	160	134
8	Universitas Diponegoro	200	177	134
9	Universitas Brawijaya	225	208	172
10	Universitas Sebelas Maret	351–400	301–350	221
11	Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah	–	–	751–800
12	Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim	–	–	901+

Source: (*QS* World University Rankings 2025, 2025)

standards. Internationalisation is a strategic step towards creating a globally competitive higher education environment, a prerequisite for achieving WCU status. However, scholars differ in their views on WCU indicators (Li & Eryong, 2021). Huang argues that WCU indicators are subject to individual interpretation. He cites experts such as Altbach, who defines a world-class university as a research university. Samil describes a WCU as having three main components: a concentration of

Table 5
Comparison between SULES Institution and SIHEI Non-SULES.

Characteristic	SULES institutions	SIHEI non-SULES
Financial Autonomy	More Autonomous, Less Government Control	Less Autonomous, Under Government Control
HR Management Autonomy	Possible to recruit new workers independently	Impossible to recruit new workers independently
Curriculum Autonomy	More open but under government control	Less open and under government control
Bureaucratic Procedures	More Independent	Less Independent
Typical Funding Sources	Main source from the university's business activities	Main source from the government
Global Ranking Presence	More competitive and high-ranking	Less competitive, lower ranking

top talent, abundant resources, and good governance. Shin provides an example of a WCU as a globally competitive university that upholds humanitarian values and focuses on teaching and research (Huang, 2015). According to Junusi et al., a WCU is a university with a global ranking and an international reputation, excelling in academic research and innovation (Junusi et al., 2019). Hayes explains that the primary dimensions of a WCU can be observed through research activities, publication citations, and awards from research institutions, which are the most significant metrics for a WCU (Hayes, 2019).

Global university rankings such as QS World University Rankings, Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), and Times Higher Education (THE) are among the main indicators of WCU status in Indonesia. Quacquarelli Symonds, through the QS World University Rankings, ranks universities at global, regional, and national levels based on eight indicators: academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty/student ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty and student ratios, international research networks, and employment outcomes (QS World University Rankings 2023-2025, 2025, June 12).

Meanwhile, ARWU ranks WCU using the following indicators: alumni winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, highly cited researchers and institutional staff winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, research output (articles published in *Nature* and *Science*), indexed articles in the Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index, and per capita academic performance (Shanghai Ranking, 2022). Times Higher Education (THE) uses the following indicators: teaching, research, citations, industry income, and international outlook (Liu et al., 2019).

In 2024, two SIHEI in Indonesia were listed in the Asian regional university rankings: Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, ranked 751–800, and Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, ranked 901 (Kementerian Agama RI, 2024a). The internationalisation process of State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (SIHEI) is not instantaneous. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang (Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim) initiated its internationalisation program in 2004. The development process consists of three phases: the Academic Reinforcement Phase (2005–2010), the Regional Recognition and Reputation Phase (2011–2020), and the International Recognition and Reputation Phase (2021–2030) (Informant 2, interview, February 3, 2024).

" Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has outlined nine priority programs known as the University's General Guidelines (UGG). These priorities include strengthening the integration of Islam and science, optimising the role of *ma'had al-jamiah* (Islamic boarding school), improving foreign language competence through a bilingual program (Arabic and English), enhancing the quality and quantity of human resources, revitalising the university's social and religious roles through research and community service, optimising information and technology-based management, fostering the university's internationalisation, institutional development, and

exploring diverse funding sources (Informant 6, interview, 3 February 2024).

The academic quality enhancement based on integrating Islam and science has become a hallmark of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim's global standard curriculum internationalisation. This approach aims to develop students' academic abilities and reinforce Islamic values relevant to modern scientific advancements. By integrating these aspects, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim strives to produce graduates who are proficient in science and possess strong Islamic morals and ethics, enabling them to contribute globally as individuals with excellence, integrity, and high competitiveness. Curriculum development at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim reflects the *Ulul Albab* character, where students are expected to possess spiritual depth, noble character, broad knowledge, and professional maturity (Informant 7, interview, January 12, 2024). The enhancement of foreign language competence through the bilingual program (Arabic and English) is consistently implemented at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim. From the first semester, students are introduced to Arabic, English, and Indonesian language improvement programs. This initiative enables students to access and apply knowledge in the global arena. (Sudiongko, 2022).

Improvements in the quality and quantity of human resources also accompany the internationalisation of the curriculum. Through a partnership with the Saudi Fund for Development, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim offers scholarships to lecturers and alumni to continue their studies at domestic and international universities. Improvements in the quality and quantity of human resources also accompany the internationalisation of the curriculum. Through a partnership with the Saudi Fund for Development, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim offers scholarships to lecturers and alumni to continue their studies at domestic and international universities (Informant 8, interview, February 3, 2024). Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim lecturers can also teach at partner universities, such as Al-Azhar University in Egypt. Collaborative research with international institutions is also being expanded, with partner institutions including Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Melbourne University Australia, and Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi Tukey(Informant 4, interview, March 3, 2024).

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has intensified its internationalisation efforts by increasing the number of international scientific publications in globally reputable journals indexed by Scopus or Web of Science (WoS). As of 2024, 1159 Scopus-indexed journal articles were affiliated with Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, with 841 affiliated authors. These publications involve collaborations with 150 partner institutions from Indonesia and abroad. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim also provides annual grants for publishing reputable scientific articles and has four journals indexed by Scopus/WoS. The internationalisation of SIHEI towards achieving WCU status is characterised by student and faculty mobility. This program aims to broaden global experiences for students, lecturers, and academic staff while strengthening international networks. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim's partner institutions are spread across various countries, including Malaysia, Turkey, France, Australia, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Thailand, and South Korea. International partnerships and collaborations continue to be expanded (Informant 5, interview, April 3, 2024).

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim builds global academic networks through partnership programs, facilitating double degree programs, joint research, and international conferences. The university is committed to becoming a centre for moderate Islamic studies with global relevance. For example, in 2024, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim collaborated with Rajamangala University in Thailand to organise the International Conference on Interreligious Dialogue. Informant 2, the Vice Rector of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim on Academic Affairs stated:

"We need moderate worldview to make harmonious life. Moderate approach to religion could foster world peace. Religious moderation goes beyond mutual respect and involves understanding the values upheld by each religion. Through dialogue and collaboration, bridges between religions can be built, fostering an inclusive environment (Informant 2, interview, 3 February 2024)"

The Indonesian government has been working to enhance the reputation of its universities as world-class institutions, but these efforts remain suboptimal. Research by Prasojo and Jannah highlights that the implementation of WCU in Indonesia is hindered by regulatory changes, policy and stakeholder misalignment, limited asset development, human resource recruitment and allocation, and challenges in opening new study programs (Prasojo & Jannah, 2020). The journey of SIHEI towards WCU status faces several challenges. The alignment of Islamic values-based curricula with global standards is often associated with politics, security, or conservatism issues. This stigma can affect SIHEI's reputation. Adjustments to global curricula in SIHEI are sometimes viewed as a threat to the authenticity of Islamic higher education. The WCU concept is also linked to the market's dominance over education or a new form of colonialism (Byun et al., 2013; Li & Eryong, 2021). The inclusiveness of study programs may cause international students from non-Muslim backgrounds to hesitate to join SIHEI. Additionally, potential international partner institutions may have principles that differ from Islamic values, requiring intensive negotiations to align these values.

3.2. State universities as legal entities (SULES) as an instrument to accelerate the achievement of WCU status

Autonomy in management and financial governance is considered a solution for universities in Indonesia to achieve WCU status. The management of public universities in Indonesia is divided into three systems (Inspectorate General of the Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023). First, **public university work units**: Universities under this system lack financial and institutional authority. All funds must be deposited into the government's account at the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia and are later disbursed to the work units based on their annual work programs. Second, **public universities with public service agency status**: Universities operating under this system have autonomy in managing non-tax state revenue (Rudhianto et al., 2022). However, they do not have full authority over institutional development. For instance, establishing new study programs requires approval from the central government. Third, **public universities with legal entity status (SULES)**: Universities with this system have full autonomy in managing finances and resources, including faculty and administrative staff. This management model resembles that of corporations, providing greater flexibility. Public universities with legal entity status have the authority to open study programs based on job market demands (Darlis et al., 2023; Nurhanifah & Kusdarini, 2022).

The transformation of public universities into SULES began in the 2000s (Muttaqin, 2008; Santosa, 2014). The government converted the status of four public universities—Universitas Indonesia, Institut Pertanian Bogor, Institut Teknologi Bandung, and Universitas Gadjah Mada—into state-owned legal entities, granting them autonomy to manage their finances (Utomo, 2008). In 2009, the Indonesian government enacted Law No. September 2009 concerning Educational Legal Entities as the legal basis for privatising public universities. However, this law was annulled by the Constitutional Court in 2010 (Thaher, 2023). A new regulation on SULES was later established through Law No. December 2012 on Higher Education (Nurhanifah & Kusdarini, 2022). The privatisation of public universities aims to grant universities the authority to manage their resources autonomously to improve services for stakeholders (Muslim et al., 2021, pp. 509–515).

SULES aims to enhance the quality of education and overall welfare. SULES institutions have independence in governance and decision-making (Anggraini, 2019). Managerial authority allows universities to function as private legal entities. SULES's independence covers both academic and non-academic matters. Non-academic autonomy includes independently managing organisational structure, finances, student affairs, human resources, and supporting facilities (Gunawan et al., 2018). Financial autonomy is a defining characteristic of SULES management (Sagara & Yustini, 2019). According to Government Regulation No. 26 of 2015, as amended by Government Regulation No. 8 of 2020 concerning the Structure and Mechanism of SULES Funding, funding sources for SULES come from two main categories: state budgets (APBN) and non-state budgets. The regulation grants SULES the freedom to explore non-state budget funding sources. One potential non-state revenue stream for SULES is asset utilisation. SULES assets are divided into fixed assets (land) and non-land assets. Land acquired through state budget funds is classified as State Property (BMN), while land acquired through SULES's business activities and non-land assets belong to SULES as its wealth (Nurmillah, 2022).

In addition to utilising assets, public participation in higher education funding is encouraged. This can take the form of individual and/or corporate donations, as regulated by applicable laws (Gunawan et al., 2018). Public universities with SULES status can expand their networks and engage stakeholders. In business administration, stakeholders refer to shareholders or individuals who invest to receive dividends (Kettunen, 2015). Higher education stakeholders are divided into two categories: internal and external stakeholders (Kettunen, 2015). Internal stakeholders include students and academic staff, while external stakeholders include corporations, partner institutions, and the government (Camilleri, 2021).

SULES institutions are also granted autonomy to create human resource development programs that support the internationalisation of universities. Additionally, institutional governance and supporting facilities are crucial in achieving WCU status (Pietrzak et al., 2015). Sustainable management is essential for institutions to adapt to technological advancements (Abad-Segura et al., 2020). In Indonesia, there are 24 universities with SULES status, 16 of which have entered the global rankings according to the QS World University Rankings. Below is the QS World University Rankings data for Indonesian public universities.Table 3

The SIHEI institutions that have entered the QS World University Rankings for the Asian region are UIN Jakarta, ranked 751–800, and Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, ranked 901 (Kementerian Agama RI, 2024a)Table 4.

However, neither of these institutions holds SULES. Despite its advantages, university autonomy through SULES also presents challenges. SULES management is often perceived as a form of education commercialisation in Indonesia (Muslim et al., 2021, pp. 509–515). SULES institutions rely on revenue from tuition fees and other sources, such as partnerships with industries. As a result, tuition fees are often higher. Universities with SULES status have faced public criticism for imposing high education costs (Singgih, 2024). This has led to some prospective students losing the opportunity to pursue quality higher education due to financial constraints (Gunawan, 2024). Sometimes, online loans encourage students to finance their education (Lumbanrau & Pasaribu, 2024).

Access to higher education becomes more difficult for underprivileged groups. SULES is often seen as the privatisation of higher education, which contradicts the principle of education as a fundamental right (Diyanto et al., 2021). The privatisation of public universities is marked by changes in their funding structures (Parker, 2011). Government financial support for universities is reduced, compelling universities to engage in entrepreneurial activities to meet their financial needs. Universities may also utilise philanthropic funds and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives as part of their funding base (Godonoga & Sporn, 2023; Usman & Ab Rahman, 2022). However, utilising CSR funds requires support from industries, partnerships, and government regulations (Kholis et al., 2023). Privatising public universities has led to university management being increasingly aligned with industry

demands (Kwiek, 2017). Privatisation of state universities will change universities' values, culture and working systems, similar to non-profit companies (Dee et al., 2023). The significant autonomy granted to SULES institutions enables them to run more profit-oriented programs, such as offering international classes or forming industrial partnerships, potentially shifting the focus away from their primary educational mission of fostering national intellectual growth.

The management of SULES institutions, which is more like businesses, results in a shift in educational values. Higher education, originally intended to foster intellectual development, has become more profit-driven. When campus management prioritises business aspects, the focus of education often shifts from character building, knowledge development, and community service to achieving financial targets. This changing tendency is evident in rising tuition fees, the dominance of study programs with high revenue potential, and policies favouring industrial collaborations over pure research development. Consequently, the inclusive and humanistic mission of education risks being replaced by a pragmatic approach that prioritises material gain while neglecting the moral, social, and academic values that should be at the core of higher education institutions.Table 5

3.3. Institutional values to mitigate negative effects of SULES

Research by Fuadi et al. (2021) indicates that SULES management must be supported by cultural values, traditions, and social norms that thrive within the community. These values serve as a control mechanism for the direction of SULES institutions (Murdiana et al., 2024). The implementation of SULES must be balanced with institutional values as a mitigation effort to address the impacts of university autonomy. Although autonomous higher education institutions enable alumni to compete globally, they also raise issues such as the commercialisation of education (Fjellman & Haley, 2023; Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra, 2024; Lahmandi-Ayed et al., 2021), unequal access to education for the poor (Hasanah et al., 2024; Sakhiyya & Wijaya Mulya, 2023), and degraded moral values (Baltodano, 2023). Higher education institutions that integrate institutional values into their management can create a unique identity that distinguishes them from other institutions in the global competition era. This local wisdom-based uniqueness attracts prospective students, lecturers, and partners. Institutional values make universities more relevant to the needs of the surrounding community. Institutions incorporating institutional values into their governance are better positioned to collaborate with local governments, communities, and the local industrial sector. This fosters a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship between the university and the surrounding community. Integrating institutional values into the learning process aims to ensure that universities do not merely produce graduates who meet market demands but also shape individuals with strong character (Adiyono et al., 2024).

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, one of the internationally recognized SIHEI according to QS World University Rankings, has demonstrated the application of institutional values in institutional management, even though it has not yet attained SULES status. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has developed its institutional values based on the *Ulul Albab* paradigm, which has been implemented since 2004 (Informant 1, interview, April 3, 2024). The *Ulul Albab* paradigm is derived from the Qur'an, the fundamental basis for Islamic education (Munawar et al., 2024). This paradigm teaches the academic community to always remember God in all circumstances, as all human behaviour is overseen by God and must be accounted for. The values encompassed within the *Ulul Albab* paradigm include *muraqabah* (Islamic meditation)*, syukur* (gratitude), *yaqin* (belief), *raja'* (hope), *khauf* (fear), *zuhud* (asceticism), *dzikr* (remembrance) and *tafakkur* (contemplation), deriving lessons from Qur'anic verses, sincerity, love for God (*mahabbatullah*), trust in God (*tawakkal*), caution in observing what is permissible and forbidden, self-control, discernment in receiving information, readiness for the afterlife, and *istiqamah* (steadfastness)

(Sàdiyah, 2020).

The *Ulul Albab* paradigm focuses on four aspects: spiritual depth, moral excellence, intellectual breadth, and professional maturity. Spirituality and morality serve as the foundation of higher education at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Sarkowi, 2023; Tharaba et al., 2021). Higher education aims not only to produce intellectually capable graduates but also to nurture individuals with strong character and morals. Spirituality and morality contribute to building personal integrity, which is essential for facing challenges in the workforce. In a constantly changing world, individuals must make decisions based on strong moral principles. Higher education that emphasizes spirituality and morality ensures graduates have an ethical foundation in their actions. Many social problems, such as corruption, injustice, intolerance, and conflict, stem from a lack of morality (Alva et al., 2021; Din et al., 2023; Lutfi et al., 2023; Silver et al., 2022; Wijaya Mulya & Pertiwi, 2024). Spirituality equips graduates with the resilience to withstand life's pressures. Job competition and financial challenges can lead to stress, depression, and even suicide (Claveria, 2022; Vandoros & Kawachi, 2021).

Higher education that instils spiritual and moral values can provide a long-term solution for shaping graduates with strong character and a sense of responsibility. Spirituality helps students cultivate inner peace, gratitude, and a clear sense of purpose in life (Fuertes & Dugan, 2021; Jamal, 2023). Spirituality benefits individuals, society, the workplace, and the nation (Sapra et al., 2021). For this reason, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim integrates *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) education into its campus governance and higher education programs. All students are required to participate in the *Ma'had Al-Jami'ah* Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim program for one year (Karimah & Bakir, 2022; Rahman et al., 2023, pp. 135–154). The core activities of this program include congregational prayers, studies of classical *fiqh* texts, Qur'anic and Hadith studies, and language enhancement (Informant 7, interview, January 12, 2024).

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim rector, Informant 1, stated:

> "In our university, we integrate science and religious values comprehensively. We acknowledge that developing knowledge without faith and morals can lead to significant harm. Through the Ma'had Al-Jami'ah activities, students are taught discipline, a strong work ethic, skillfulness, commitment, and objectivity. Institutional values can be used as competitive capital in the era of globalisation (Informant 1, interview, 3 April 2024)".

This statement shows that morality is very important to develop science using institutional values based on religious teachings. This university has a specific education system by adopting an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) for all the first-year students. These students have a lot of activities to build strong characters for their future. Furthermore, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim strengthens the mental and spiritual capacity of the community. Islamic values are disseminated through community service programs, such as the mosque-based Family Empowerment Post and the Family Corner initiative (Cholil & Mahpur, 2012; Sudirman et al., 2021). Both programs aim to build individual and family resilience to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim is committed to reducing economic disparities in the community by providing economic assistance. Community Service and Philanthropy Programs have been elevated to flagship initiatives. These two programs are designed to mitigate the economic impact of the transformation from SIHEI to SULES. One of the leading community service programs is *Qaryah Thayyibah* (Smart Village). This program aims to liberate communities from the five social vices known as *Mo Limo*—stealing, adultery, gambling, drug abuse, and intoxication. It also seeks to foster a safe, clean, healthy, and beautiful environment; promote harmonious, peaceful, and prosperous community life; encourage the vibrancy of

places of worship; and ultimately bring blessings to all residents in the surrounding area. (LPPM UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim, 2025, p. 1). Through the *Qaryah Thayyibah* program, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim educates families and improves their income. The Communities are empowered through training programs that transform local resources into economically valuable products, particularly by supporting cooperative initiatives to process bananas and moringa leaves into a variety of high-value food products. (Hardiyanto, 2022). One of the successful programs under *Qaryah Thayyibah* (Smart Village) that has contributed to increasing household income is the processing of *kelor* leaves (*moringa oleifera*) into high-value products. In East Java, moringa has traditionally been considered taboo for consumption due to its association with funeral rites, particularly in bathing the deceased. However, a widespread campaign promoting healthy living through the use of herbal products has successfully shifted public perception toward moringa. In addition to being consumed as a vegetable, moringa leaves are now processed into various products such as herbal drinks, chocolate, and food additives. A Senior Lecturer and *Qaryah Thayyibah* facilitator from the Department of Chemistry at Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, stated:

> Laboratory tests have shown that moringa leaves contain 19 amino acids and over 90 chemical compounds that are nutritious and beneficial to human health. Moringa leaves also offer a safer alternative for long-term treatment when consumed in appropriate dosages. Herbal remedies tend to be more affordable, as they are derived from the natural resources available in the surrounding environment. It is therefore our responsibility to study the various plants that God has created and harness their potential for the well-being of humanity. (Informant 11, interview, 13 June 2025).

The empowerment of *Moringa oleifera* (moringa leaves) serves as a manifestation of the values of *dhikr* (remembrance of God) and *tafakkur* (critical contemplation), which are central to the *Ulul Albab* paradigm. This paradigm is rooted in the Qur'anic injunction found in Surah Āli 'Imrān [3]: 190–191, which emphasizes the integration of intellectual reflection and spiritual consciousness. Accordingly, every initiative undertaken by the academic community of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim—including community engagement and service programs—should embody the foundational values of *Ulul Albab*, which call for the harmonization of faith, knowledge, and ethical action in pursuit of societal well-being. (Informant 1, interview, April 3, 2024).

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has established the Halal Product Research and Development Institute (LP3H) Halal Centre. This institution facilitates the certification of halal products, especially for micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Informant 5, interview, April 3, 2024). This initiative aims to increase consumer trust, expand market reach, and ensure business activities receive blessings and legitimacy (Wijaya, 2024)The Research and Community Service Institute (LP2M) of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has partnered with the Ministry of Labour (Kemenaker) of the Republic of Indonesia to provide support to several Community Job Training Centres (BLK Komunitas) across Indonesia in 2024. The BLK Komunitas mentorship program serves as an entrepreneurship incubator, not only concentrated on Java Island but also in other regions throughout Indonesia. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim specifically supports BLK Komunitas located in various *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) with different areas of expertise. The primary goal of this program is to transform BLK Komunitas into entrepreneurship incubators for the community, particularly within *pesantren* environments. The program aims to foster entrepreneurial spirit and reduce unemployment (Informant 5, interview, April 3, 2024). Informant 5, the head of LP2M Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim said:

> "Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim seeks to improve community welfare. The 23 BLK Komunitas, under the mentorship of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, are spread across three

provinces: East Java, *West* Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara. These programs reflect the *Ulul Albab* values developed and disseminated by Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim. Students, alumni, and community members are expected to achieve financial independence, possess good morals, and have a strong understanding of spirituality, enabling them to face the challenges and pressures of globalisation (Informant 5, interview, 3 April 2024)"

The explanation above shows that Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has a high concern for economic independence. Various efforts to support this independence are closely related to the institutional values that have been embedded since this campus was established. Over time, institutional values are not only owned by campus leaders, but have become an integrative part of the life of every university element, such as lecturers and students.

Furthermore, the contribution of institutional values to Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim and the academic community is that Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim does not only rely on tuition fees for campus development. In addition to their business, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim encourages lecturers to have a high concern for helping students to continue studying smoothly. For this reason, the spirit of philanthropy is very important. The lecturers are accustomed to giving their zakat to the campus and that they are willing to deduct 2.5 % from their salary every month. From this data, it can be seen that students will be facilitated to continue studying without financial constraints. This spirit is certainly based on the spirit of devoting oneself to God. (Informant 3, interview, April 3, 2024)

For every Muslim, the duty of mankind on this earth is to be *khalifah* (successor) and *abdullah* (servant). When they become khalifah, they must be able to sustain the life of mankind and living creatures. Islam clearly forbids its followers to do damage. they must have a concern for their environment. Furthermore, as servants, they must be able to dedicate their entire body and soul to only God. They will not be able to do anything without God's grace and help. For this reason, the sustenance that they have is definitely not their own, but there are other people's rights in it. With this spirit of spiritual depth and moral greatness, they have the awareness to ease the burden on underprivileged students. One of them, Informant 9, stated:

> "We are lucky to have very generous lecturers. We have received scholarship from this university during our study here. Hopefully, this situation will continue constantly for the sake of the successful leaders in the future (Informant 9, interview, 3 April 2024)"

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim has established, a philanthropic institution, el-Zawa, since 2007. This institution has provided scholarships for hundreds of students. Of course, this can increase along with the amount of funds collected by this institution. State Islamic University Malang. In addition, El-Zawa raises funds through special fundraising events organized on campus. Through these fundraising programs, El-Zawa collects approximately IDR 500 million annually. These funds are then distributed through flagship programs such as Jatim Cerdas, Jatim Peduli, Jatim Sehat, Jatim Taqwa, and Jatim Makmur (El-Zawa, 2020). In connection with the cost of education, informant 10 stated:

> "El-Zawa runs a program called Jatim Cerdas (Smart East Java), through which we provide educational assistance to underprivileged communities, covering all levels of education—from primary and secondary education to higher education. The total amount of funding allocated for this program reaches IDR 250 million annually. Students of Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University Malang who come from low-income families or are classified as mustahiq zakat (eligible zakat recipients) receive educational assistance amounting to IDR 2 million per semester. Each year, we provide support to approximately 60 students across various academic disciplines, including the social sciences and humanities, science and

technology, and medicine. In addition to financial assistance, we also offer skill development through training programs. Furthermore, we facilitate their involvement in community service activities, enabling them to apply and share their talents and knowledge for the benefit of society (Informant 10, interview, 6 October 2024)."

The educational assistance program implemented by El-Zawa is a reflection of gratitude (*syukr*) for the sustenance granted by God. This sense of gratitude is not expressed solely through spiritual worship, but is also manifested through concrete actions. El-Zawa strives to provide more inclusive and equitable access to education for children from underprivileged families. The program also instills the values of *yaqin* (firm belief) and *raja'* (hope). Human beings cannot fulfill their life needs without divine intervention—an essential foundation in Islamic teachings and education. In the context of higher education, those who face financial hardship but possess a strong determination to improve their lives through education should not despair; instead, they must maintain faith in God's help. One of the manifestations of such divine assistance is the presence of philanthropic institutions like El-Zawa. By this cooperation and the implementation of institutional values, Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim will be able to mitigate negative effects of SULES. Ulul Albab paradigm established in every person's character will encourage them to be always connected to God and to avoid profit-oriented institution. Thus, they will focus on the community welfare, especially for their students.

4. Conclusion

SULES (State University with Legal Entity Status) is a strategic instrument for SIHEI (State Islamic Higher Education Institutions) to achieve World Class University (WCU) status. Through SULES, universities gain the authority and flexibility to independently manage their financial and institutional resources. SIHEI can improve operational efficiency and foster innovation in both academic and non-academic aspects. However, university autonomy must be implemented using a local value-based approach to anticipate and mitigate potential negative impacts of higher education privatisation, such as excessive commercialisation or the loss of religious identity. By combining the advantages of SULES with the integration of institutional values, SIHEI can maintain its identity and strategic role in advancing religious higher education in Indonesia while competing globally. Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, one of the SIHEI institutions that has achieved global rankings, integrates the *Ulul Albab* values to mitigate the impacts of educational internationalisation. The *Ulul Albab* values shape students, alumni, and the community with spiritual intelligence, strong morality, intellectual excellence, and professional conduct. These traits equip students with the necessary foundation to face global competition. While this study offers important insights into the dynamics within Indonesian Islamic universities, it is important to note that the findings are context-specific. As such, the generalizability of the results to broader educational settings—particularly those outside the Indonesian Islamic university context—remains limited. This contextual constraint has been acknowledged and critically discussed in the final section, to guide future research and avoid overgeneralization.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Sudirman Sudirman: Writing – original draft, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Ramadhita Ramadhita:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology. **Syabbul Bachri:** Writing – review & editing, Resources. **Yayuk Whindari:** Validation, Resources, Methodology.

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in this

research. Each participant was provided with detailed information regarding the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights, and they voluntarily agreed to participate.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang No. 1559/LP@2/TL.April 00, 2023. The research protocol adhered to all institutional and international ethical guidelines applicable to this study.

Declaration of the use of AI

During the preparation of this work the authors used Grammarly for proof reading and spell checking. The authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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