

KKNI-Based Curriculum Reform in Islamic Higher Education: Evidence from a Peripheral Institution in Eastern Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have become central to higher education reform by promoting competency-based learning outcomes, graduate employability, and quality assurance. In Indonesia, the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) requires higher education institutions to redesign curricula according to Outcome-Based Education (OBE) principles. However, empirical studies have primarily focused on well-resourced state Islamic universities, while evidence from private Islamic higher education institutions in geographically peripheral regions remains limited. This study examines the implementation of a KKNI-based curriculum in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program at STAI Babussalam Sula, North Maluku. This study employed a qualitative case study design involving semi-structured interviews with the head of the study program, a lecturer, and an alumna, supported by classroom observations and curriculum document analysis. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation, member checking, reflexive field notes, and an audit trail. The findings indicate that the curriculum is generally aligned with KKNI Level 6 through clearly articulated learning outcomes, constructive alignment, and student-centered learning practices. The curriculum integrates Islamic values across courses while fostering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies. Nevertheless, implementation remains constrained by limited lecturer capacity in Outcome-Based Education design and insufficiently systematic curriculum evaluation. The study also identifies a model of *theologically embedded constructive alignment*, in which competency-based curriculum reform is integrated with Qur'anic epistemological foundations. This study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how competency-based curriculum reform can be contextually adapted within a resource-constrained Islamic higher education institution. The findings highlight the importance of integrating institutional identity, faculty development, and Islamic educational values to strengthen the implementation and sustainability of KKNI-based curriculum reform in peripheral higher education settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have become one of the most influential policy instruments in contemporary higher education reform, providing a common reference for standardizing learning outcomes, strengthening graduate employability, and improving the international comparability of academic qualifications. Originating from the Bologna Process in Europe, NQFs have subsequently been adopted by many countries as part of broader efforts to enhance educational quality, institutional accountability, and workforce competitiveness (Allais, 2011; Chakroun, 2010). Rather than functioning merely as administrative frameworks, NQFs encourage universities to redesign curricula based on measurable competencies, ensuring that graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes required by rapidly changing social and labor market demands. Consequently, curriculum development has shifted from traditional content-oriented approaches toward Outcome-Based Education (OBE), where learning outcomes become the primary reference for curriculum design, teaching strategies, and assessment systems (Biggs, 1996).

In Southeast Asia, competency-based curriculum reform has become an important strategy for strengthening higher education quality and promoting regional educational integration. Countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia have implemented national qualification frameworks to improve curriculum coherence, graduate mobility, and institutional competitiveness within increasingly globalized higher education systems (Allais, 2011). These reforms require universities to move beyond knowledge transmission by designing curricula that foster demonstrable competencies, lifelong learning, critical thinking, and professional adaptability. Consequently, higher education institutions are expected to ensure constructive alignment among graduate profiles, learning outcomes, instructional activities, and assessment, enabling graduates to demonstrate competencies that are relevant to both national development priorities and international quality standards (Biggs, 1996).

Indonesia formally introduced the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (*Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia*—KKNI) through Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2012, subsequently integrating it into the National Standards for Higher Education (*Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi*). The framework establishes nine qualification levels, with undergraduate programs positioned at Level 6, requiring graduates to demonstrate comprehensive theoretical knowledge, practical competence, professional responsibility, and problem-solving abilities (Sutrisno & Latifah, 2019). The implementation of KKNI has fundamentally transformed curriculum development in Indonesian higher education by requiring institutions to formulate measurable graduate learning outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran Lulusan*), redesign course structures, implement student-centered learning, and develop competency-based assessment systems. Accordingly, curriculum quality is increasingly evaluated not by the volume of content delivered but by the extent to which graduates achieve predefined competencies that reflect professional, academic, and societal expectations.

Although KKNI has become the national standard for curriculum development, its implementation remains uneven across Indonesian higher education institutions. Differences in institutional capacity, faculty qualifications, infrastructure, leadership, and access to professional development significantly influence universities' ability to implement competency-based curriculum reform effectively. These challenges are particularly evident among private Islamic higher education institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Agama Islam Swasta*—PTAIS) located in geographically peripheral regions, where limited institutional resources frequently constrain curriculum innovation and academic quality assurance (Ahid & Chamid, 2021; Azhar et al., 2023). Under such circumstances, curriculum reform often emphasizes compliance with regulatory requirements rather than the comprehensive transformation of teaching, learning, and assessment practices envisioned by Outcome-Based Education. Consequently, understanding how peripheral institutions interpret and implement KKNI becomes essential for evaluating the broader effectiveness of Indonesia's higher education reform agenda.

The implementation of KKNI within Islamic higher education presents additional complexity because curriculum reform involves not only technical alignment with national competency standards

but also the preservation of Islamic educational identity. Unlike secular higher education institutions, Islamic universities are expected to integrate disciplinary knowledge with Qur'anic values, Islamic ethics, and character formation while simultaneously meeting national accreditation requirements and competency-based educational standards. This dual responsibility requires curriculum developers to negotiate between internationally recognized educational frameworks and locally grounded Islamic epistemologies. As a result, curriculum reform in Islamic higher education represents both a pedagogical and epistemological transformation, requiring institutions to balance professional competency development with the broader educational mission of nurturing morally responsible graduates.

Previous research has extensively examined the implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks and competency-based curriculum reform in higher education. International studies consistently identify lecturer readiness, institutional capacity, curriculum alignment, and quality assurance mechanisms as major determinants of successful implementation (Allais, 2011; Biggs, 1996). Within the Indonesian context, studies have similarly reported challenges related to learning outcome formulation, Outcome-Based Education implementation, and faculty preparedness in adapting competency-oriented curricula (Fauzan & Latip, 2015; Samsuri et al., 2025). Research conducted in Islamic higher education has further demonstrated that curriculum reform frequently requires balancing national educational policies with Islamic educational philosophy and institutional values (Alkandari, 2023; Bin Jamil et al., 2024). These studies collectively suggest that competency-based curriculum reform depends not solely on regulatory compliance but also on institutional readiness, academic leadership, and contextual adaptation.

Despite these important contributions, two significant gaps remain in the existing literature. First, empirical studies have predominantly focused on large, well-resourced state Islamic universities located in urban areas of western Indonesia. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to private Islamic higher education institutions operating in geographically peripheral regions, where institutional constraints and limited access to academic support systems may influence curriculum implementation differently. Second, while previous studies have discussed curriculum alignment and Outcome-Based Education, relatively few have examined how Islamic epistemological values are systematically integrated within competency-based curriculum frameworks. Consequently, current scholarship provides only limited understanding of how peripheral Islamic higher education institutions negotiate the relationship between national curriculum policy and institutional religious identity.

Addressing these gaps is particularly important because peripheral higher education institutions play a strategic role in expanding educational access within Indonesia's geographically diverse regions. Their experiences may reveal adaptive curriculum practices that are overlooked in studies focusing primarily on large metropolitan universities. Understanding these contextual adaptations can contribute to broader discussions concerning curriculum reform in resource-constrained higher education settings, especially within countries implementing National Qualifications Frameworks under diverse institutional conditions.

Against this background, this study investigates the implementation of the KKNI-based curriculum in the Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam*—PAI) Study Program at STAI Babussalam Sula, a private Islamic higher education institution located in North Maluku, eastern Indonesia. Specifically, the study examines four interrelated dimensions of curriculum implementation: curriculum objectives, curriculum content organization, pedagogical implementation, and curriculum evaluation. Through this institutional case, the study explores how competency-based curriculum reform is interpreted, adapted, and implemented within a geographically peripheral Islamic higher education context.

This study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it provides empirical evidence regarding KKNI implementation within a resource-constrained Islamic higher education institution, thereby extending existing discussions beyond large state universities. Second, it

demonstrates how competency-based curriculum reform can be integrated with Islamic educational values through what is conceptualized as theologically embedded constructive alignment, in which learning outcomes, pedagogy, assessment, and Qur'anic epistemology are systematically interconnected. Third, the study offers policy implications for strengthening curriculum reform, faculty development, and quality assurance in peripheral higher education institutions implementing National Qualifications Frameworks. Collectively, these contributions advance understanding of how curriculum reform can remain responsive to both national competency standards and the distinctive educational missions of Islamic higher education.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design within a naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & G, 1981). The case study approach was considered appropriate because the research aimed to investigate the implementation of the KKNI-based curriculum as a contemporary educational phenomenon situated within a specific institutional context. Rather than examining curriculum policy at a macro level, the study focused on how KKNI principles were interpreted, adapted, and operationalized within the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program at STAI Babussalam Sula.

The study adopted a naturalistic perspective because curriculum implementation is closely shaped by institutional culture, academic practices, and socio-geographical conditions that cannot be separated from their real-life context (Ali, 2002). Accordingly, the research sought to understand curriculum implementation holistically through the perspectives and experiences of institutional actors directly involved in the process.

STAI Babussalam Sula was selected purposively as an information-rich institutional case. The institution represents a geographically peripheral private Islamic higher education institution (PTAIS) implementing the KKNI curriculum under relatively limited institutional conditions. As the only PTAIS located in the Sula Islands, North Maluku, the institution operates within a context characterized by limited academic infrastructure, restricted professional development opportunities, and constrained access to higher education support systems. These characteristics make the institution particularly relevant for examining how competency-based curriculum reform is implemented and adapted within peripheral Islamic higher education settings.

2.2 Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program at STAI Babussalam Sula, North Maluku Province, Indonesia, from February to April 2026. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation processes.

Three participants were involved in the study to represent different institutional perspectives. The first participant was the Head of the PAI Study Program, representing curriculum leadership and institutional policy perspectives. The second participant was a senior lecturer involved in curriculum implementation and classroom instruction, representing the academic-operational perspective. The third participant was a graduate of the PAI Study Program, representing the student and alumni experience perspective regarding curriculum implementation outcomes.

Although the number of participants was relatively limited, this reflects the institutional scale of the study site and aligns with the logic of qualitative case study research, which prioritizes depth of information over numerical representation (Creswell J. W. & Poth, 2018).

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia using flexible

interview guidelines developed according to the research objectives. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and explored participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding KKNi curriculum implementation, curriculum alignment, pedagogical practices, and institutional challenges.

Observations were conducted to examine teaching and learning activities, curriculum implementation practices, and institutional academic processes within the PAI Study Program. The researcher's position as a lecturer within the institution enabled sustained naturalistic access to curriculum practices and institutional interactions. To minimize potential bias associated with this insider position, observational findings were continuously compared with interview data and institutional documents throughout the research process.

Document analysis focused on institutional curriculum documents, including the KKNi Curriculum Document of the PAI Study Program (2023 edition), Semester Learning Plans (RPS), academic guidelines, and supporting curriculum evaluation documents. These documents were analyzed to identify curriculum structures, learning outcomes, assessment systems, and the integration of Islamic educational values within the KKNi framework. The use of multiple data sources enabled methodological triangulation and facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum implementation within the institutional setting.

2.4 Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis procedures supported by the interactive analytical model of Miles and Huberman (Matthew B Miles & Huberman, 2014), consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process began with repeated reading of interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents to achieve data familiarization.

Initial coding was conducted inductively by identifying recurring concepts, patterns, and issues emerging from the data. Codes were not predetermined but developed progressively during the analysis process. Similar codes were subsequently grouped into broader analytical categories related to curriculum objectives, curriculum content organization, pedagogical implementation, curriculum integration, and evaluation practices.

Through continuous comparison across interviews, observations, and documents, broader themes gradually emerged concerning institutional adaptation to KKNi policies, implementation challenges, student-centered learning practices, and the integration of Islamic educational values within competency-based curriculum frameworks. The coding and categorization process was iterative, allowing themes to be refined continuously throughout the analysis.

Data displays in narrative and tabular forms were used to organize findings systematically and support interpretive analysis. Conclusions were generated through repeated verification across data sources to ensure consistency and analytical coherence.

2.5 Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the trustworthiness and transparency of the study. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing interview findings with observational data and institutional documents. Second, method triangulation was applied through the integration of interviews, observations, and document analysis to strengthen interpretive consistency.

Member checking was conducted by returning interview summaries and preliminary interpretations to participants to confirm the accuracy of representations and interpretations. In addition, the researcher maintained reflective field notes and an audit trail documenting interview procedures, coding decisions, theme development, and analytical reflections throughout the research process.

Given the researcher's dual role as lecturer and researcher within the institution, reflexivity constituted an important aspect of the study. Potential researcher bias was managed through continuous self-reflection, systematic comparison among data sources, and repeated analytical review

during coding and interpretation stages. Rather than relying solely on personal interpretation, findings were grounded in recurring evidence consistently identified across interviews, observations, and institutional documents. Ethical considerations included institutional permission from STAI Babussalam Sula, voluntary informed consent from all participants, confidentiality of participant information, and anonymization of sensitive institutional data used in the study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Findings

3.1.1 Curriculum Objectives and Graduate Competencies

The findings indicate that the KKNi-based curriculum in the PAI Study Program at STAI Babussalam Sula has been formally aligned with KKNi Level 6 descriptors (Sukirman, 2022). The implementation of KKNi represents a broader curriculum reform in Islamic higher education (A. Akrim et al., 2022). Document analysis and interviews identified four primary curriculum objectives: (1) restructuring the curriculum according to KKNi regulations, (2) establishing measurable graduate qualifications, (3) formulating learning outcomes aligned with KKNi Level 6, and (4) improving instructional and assessment systems.

The program defines four graduate competency domains: Islamic education expertise, research capability, community service engagement, and institutional collaboration. These competencies are integrated into curriculum documents, Semester Learning Plans (RPS), and course structures. However, interviews revealed that not all lecturers possess sufficient competency in Outcome-Based Education (OBE) design, particularly in preparing KKNi-oriented RPS documents. Consequently, curriculum implementation depends heavily on senior and certified lecturers.

3.1.2 Curriculum Content and Islamic Knowledge Integration

The KKNi curriculum consists of 152 credit hours distributed across national, institutional, faculty, and program-specific courses. The curriculum integrates five core Islamic knowledge domains: Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic history.

Table 1. Simplified Structure of KKNi Curriculum

Curriculum Component	Credits	Main Focus
National Courses	16	Citizenship and language competencies
Institutional Courses	32	Islamic foundations and academic skills
Faculty Courses	18	Educational theory and research
PAI Core Courses	86	Islamic pedagogy and professional competencies
Total	152	KKNi-based curriculum structure

Document analysis and interview findings showed that Qur'anic references were incorporated across both Islamic and pedagogical courses. Lecturers reported integrating Qur'anic verses and Islamic ethical values into classroom learning activities. For example, the concept of human agency in *Akhlak Tasawuf* courses was associated with Q.S. Ar-Ra'd:11. Interviews also indicated that curriculum development involved consultations with lecturers, alumni, and graduate users, particularly in determining graduate profiles and course relevance.

3.1.3 Pedagogical Implementation

The implementation of the KKNi curriculum adopts Student-Centered Learning (SCL) as the dominant pedagogical approach. Learning activities are structured through the alignment of CPL (Program Learning Outcomes), CPMK (Course Learning Outcomes), and Sub-CPMK. Three competency domains were identified in instructional practice:

- a. Cognitive competencies assessed through written assignments and examinations;
- b. Affective competencies emphasizing *adab* and professional ethics; and
- c. Psychomotor competencies assessed through religious practices, microteaching, and classroom simulations.

Observation findings showed that classroom learning combined academic competency development with Islamic character formation. Participatory observations conducted in three classes indicated relatively active student engagement during collaborative learning and presentation activities.

Interviews indicated several institutional constraints related to lecturer readiness in implementing OBE-oriented teaching consistently. Internal workshops and academic supervision were used as institutional strategies to address these limitations.

3.1.4 Curriculum Evaluation

Curriculum evaluation activities included curriculum review, peer review, tracer studies, and student feedback analysis. A formal curriculum review was conducted in 2022 and resulted in several curriculum revisions, including the addition of Anti-Corruption Education courses.

A tracer study conducted in 2026 involved 17 alumni respondents from graduates between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicated that most graduates were employed in Islamic education institutions and reported positive perceptions regarding competency development during their studies.

Table 2. Alumni Competency Satisfaction and Employability

Competency Aspect	Satisfaction (%)	Main Finding
Cognitive Competency	88	Research and lesson-planning skills improved
Affective Competency	94	Qur'anic values strengthened teaching ethics
Psychomotor Competency	71	Microteaching supported classroom practice
Employability	82	Graduates employed as PAI teachers

Participatory classroom observations also indicated active student engagement during Student-Centered Learning activities and the implementation of CPL-CPMK alignment in classroom instruction.

3.2 Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) at STAI Babussalam Sula represents more than regulatory compliance; it reflects a context-sensitive process of curriculum adaptation shaped by institutional capacity, geographic conditions, and the educational philosophy of Islamic higher education. Although the curriculum has been formally aligned with KKNI Level 6 descriptors through clearly articulated graduate learning outcomes (CPL), course learning outcomes (CPMK), and competency-oriented course structures, its implementation remains influenced by the institution's limited resources and peripheral location. This finding supports previous studies indicating that successful implementation of National Qualifications Frameworks depends not only on policy mandates but also on institutional readiness, faculty capacity, and contextual adaptation (Allais, 2011; Fauzan & Latip, 2015). In peripheral higher education institutions, curriculum reform is therefore better understood as a process of institutional learning rather than a straightforward adoption of national standards.

The study further demonstrates that constructive alignment provides an effective framework for implementing KKNI within Islamic higher education. The curriculum exhibits alignment among graduate profiles, learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessment practices, reflecting the principles proposed by Biggs (1996). However, this study extends constructive alignment theory by showing that curriculum coherence in Islamic higher education incorporates an additional epistemological dimension grounded in Islamic values. Rather than functioning solely as a technical mechanism linking intended learning outcomes with instructional activities and assessment, curriculum alignment at STAI Babussalam Sula integrates Qur'anic perspectives across courses,

thereby connecting professional competence with ethical and spiritual development. This finding suggests that constructive alignment can be contextually enriched through the incorporation of institutional values without compromising competency-based educational principles.

A notable contribution of this study is the identification of what may be conceptualized as theologically embedded constructive alignment. Within this model, curriculum alignment extends beyond the traditional relationship among learning outcomes, pedagogy, and assessment by incorporating Islamic epistemological foundations as an integrative framework for curriculum development. Qur'anic values are not treated merely as supplementary religious content but function as guiding principles that shape curriculum objectives, instructional strategies, affective competencies, and graduate attributes. Consequently, competency development encompasses cognitive, psychomotor, and affective dimensions while simultaneously reinforcing Islamic ethical responsibility. This perspective complements international discussions on Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which increasingly recognize that competency frameworks should remain responsive to institutional missions and cultural contexts rather than applying universal models without adaptation (Biggs, 1996; Al-Ansi, 2022). The findings therefore suggest that competency-based curriculum reform within Islamic higher education should accommodate religious identity as an integral rather than peripheral component of educational quality.

The implementation of Student-Centered Learning (SCL) further illustrates how competency-based education is adapted within an Islamic educational environment. Classroom observations indicate that collaborative discussions, presentations, and active learning activities encourage students to construct knowledge independently while simultaneously cultivating *adab*, professional ethics, and religious responsibility. This finding expands current understandings of SCL by demonstrating that active learning in Islamic higher education serves a dual function: developing disciplinary competencies while nurturing students' moral and spiritual character. Rather than emphasizing learner autonomy alone, SCL in this context promotes balanced personal development consistent with the holistic objectives of Islamic education. Similar observations have been reported in Islamic higher education systems where competency-based reforms are interpreted through religious educational philosophies rather than exclusively secular pedagogical perspectives (Alkandari, 2023; Bin Jamil et al., 2024).

Despite these positive developments, the findings reveal that lecturer capacity remains one of the principal challenges affecting curriculum implementation. Interviews indicate that not all lecturers possess sufficient expertise in designing Outcome-Based Education, particularly in preparing KKNi-oriented Semester Learning Plans (RPS), formulating measurable learning outcomes, and developing competency-based assessment strategies. Consequently, curriculum implementation continues to rely heavily on senior lecturers with greater experience in curriculum development. Similar implementation challenges have been identified across higher education systems undergoing competency-based curriculum reform, where faculty development frequently becomes the determining factor influencing policy effectiveness (Allais, 2011; Azhar et al., 2023). These findings suggest that curriculum reform should be understood as an ongoing institutional capacity-building process rather than a one-time curriculum revision. Continuous professional development, mentoring systems, and academic supervision therefore become essential for sustaining successful KKNi implementation, particularly within resource-constrained institutions.

Another important finding concerns curriculum evaluation practices. Although STAI Babussalam Sula has implemented curriculum review, tracer studies, peer review, and student feedback mechanisms, evaluation activities remain relatively limited in measuring long-term graduate competencies and curriculum effectiveness. The tracer study demonstrates encouraging employability outcomes, with graduates successfully entering Islamic educational institutions, suggesting that the curriculum has contributed positively to professional preparation. Nevertheless, comprehensive curriculum evaluation requires systematic assessment of graduate performance, stakeholder satisfaction, and the long-term achievement of learning outcomes. Contemporary Outcome-Based

Education emphasizes continuous quality improvement through evidence-based curriculum evaluation, enabling institutions to refine curriculum design in response to changing professional and societal demands (Biggs, 1996; Samsuri et al., 2025). Strengthening evaluation mechanisms would therefore enhance both curriculum accountability and institutional quality assurance.

Finally, this study contributes to the broader literature on National Qualifications Framework implementation by providing empirical evidence from a geographically peripheral Islamic higher education institution in eastern Indonesia, a context that remains underrepresented in previous research. Existing studies have predominantly focused on large state universities with relatively strong institutional resources, whereas this study demonstrates that smaller private Islamic institutions are capable of implementing competency-based curriculum reform through adaptive institutional strategies. The findings suggest that successful curriculum reform depends not solely on compliance with national standards but on the institution's ability to integrate competency-based education with local realities, Islamic educational values, and sustained faculty development. Accordingly, this study broadens current understanding of KKNI implementation by emphasizing that curriculum reform in peripheral higher education should be viewed as a contextually negotiated process in which national policy, institutional identity, and educational practice continuously interact to produce meaningful and sustainable educational transformation.

4. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Indonesia's National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Study Program at STAI Babussalam Sula a peripheral Islamic higher education institution in North Maluku is both feasible and contextually adaptable. The findings show that constructive alignment among graduate profiles, learning outcomes (CPL), and course learning outcomes (CPMK) can be effectively achieved when institutional leadership provides coherent policy direction and sustained faculty development support. Nevertheless, the study identifies persistent gaps in lecturers' readiness to fully implement Outcome-Based Education (OBE), particularly in translating competency-based curriculum principles into consistent pedagogical practice.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on National Qualifications Framework implementation by extending its relevance beyond centralized and well-resourced institutions to marginalized higher education contexts in the Global South. It advances NQF theory by shifting attention from policy compliance to epistemological and cultural adaptation within Islamic higher education systems. The Qur'anic integration strategy developed at STAI Babussalam Sula illustrates a locally grounded model that negotiates between standardized competency frameworks and Islamic epistemological identity. This finding highlights that NQF implementation is not merely a technical curriculum reform but a context-sensitive transformation shaped by values, culture, and institutional agency. Practically, the study suggests that policy makers should strengthen OBE capacity-building programs and refine KKNI level descriptors to better accommodate affective and spiritual competencies central to Islamic education. The study is limited by its small purposive sample and single-site design; therefore, future research should employ multi-site comparative studies and mixed-method approaches, including tracer studies, to enhance the generalizability of findings on KKNI implementation in Islamic higher education.

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