THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION BODIES IN ENHANCING ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY

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Abstract

Improving the quality of Islamic higher education in Indonesia requires a quality assurance system that focuses not only on academic aspects but also on graduates' professional competence. The Professional Certification Institutions or *Lembaga Sertifikasi Profesi* (LSP) serves as a strategic instrument for bridging the gap between the world of education and the world of work. This article analyzes the role of LSP in improving the quality of Islamic higher education, focusing on policy, implementation, and its contribution to strengthening graduates' competitiveness. This research uses the library research method, examining academic literature, regulations, and relevant institutional reports. The results of the study show that the presence of LSP in Islamic universities significantly improves the quality of graduates, especially by strengthening employability, curriculum relevance, and a culture of institutional quality. LSP also serves as a means of integrating professional competence with Islamic values, making certification not just a technical assessment but also a process of shaping Islamic character and work ethics. However, the effectiveness of LSP implementation remains influenced by human resource challenges, limited testing facilities, and a lack of synergy between academic curricula and industry standards. This study concludes that strengthening LSP in Islamic universities should focus on developing assessor capacity, digitizing the certification system, and fostering sustainable collaboration with the industrial world and Islamic institutions. With professional governance and Islamic values, LSP can be the main catalyst in realizing superior, relevant, and globally competitive Islamic higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Islamic higher education in Indonesia faces a significant challenge in improving the quality of graduates to align with the needs of the world of work and global developments. Although various quality improvement policies have been implemented, data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that the open unemployment rate for university graduates remains relatively high at 6.18% in February 2024, higher than for high school or vocational school graduates (Badan Pusat Statistik [BPS], 2024). This condition indicates that the higher education process, including in Islamic universities, has not entirely produced graduates with professional competence that meets industry needs. This issue underscores the importance of a competency certification system as part of efforts to align learning outcomes with job-market demands.

Competency certification is a formal mechanism for recognizing individual abilities against defined standards. In Indonesia, the institution authorized to conduct certification is the Professional Certification Institutions (LSP), which is licensed by the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP). LSP functions to assess and recognize a person's work competency based on the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI) or other international standards (BNSP, 2020). In the context of Islamic universities, the presence of LSPs—especially LSP Party 1 (LSP-P1)—is essential because they play a direct role in preparing graduates who not only possess academic abilities but also practical competencies recognized nationally. This aligns with national policies that emphasize the importance of links and matches between education and the world of work, as stated in Permendikbudristek Number 45 of 2023 concerning the Implementation of Work Competency Certification (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology [Kemendikbudristek], 2023).

Several previous studies have shown the positive impact of LSP on the quality of graduates and the competitiveness of universities. For example, Prasetyo (2023) found that effective LSP-P1 management—including the development of certification schemes, assessor training, and the digitization of the administrative system—can strengthen the job-readiness of university graduates. Similarly, research conducted by Hidayat (2022) on LSP within State Islamic Religious Universities revealed that professional certification can increase students' confidence and expand job opportunities in the formal sector. However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on internal institutional factors, such as the availability of competent assessors, the integration of certification schemes with academic curricula, and quality management support from university leaders.

On the other hand, the literature still shows a gap in the implementation of LSP in Islamic universities. Most research focuses on administrative and

policy aspects, while in-depth studies of the real impact of LSP on the quality of Islamic higher education remain limited (Rahman & Suherman, 2023). In addition, few studies have examined how professional certification can be integrated with Outcome-Based Education (OBE), which is now a quality assurance standard in higher education (Ibrahim & Noor, 2022). Thus, a comprehensive study is needed to understand the strategic role of LSP within the competency-based quality assurance ecosystem in Islamic higher education.

In the global context, professional certification bodies also serve as important indicators in the modern higher education system. Several countries, such as Malaysia and Australia, have integrated competency certification into higher education accreditation systems and curricula (Abdullah & Zainal, 2021; Smith & Keevy, 2020). This model demonstrates that certification can serve as a bridge between the academic world and industry needs, while strengthening graduates' employability. This experience becomes relevant to be adapted in the context of Islamic higher education in Indonesia, with adjustments to Islamic values, the character of graduates, and local needs.

Based on these conceptual and empirical gaps, this article aims to examine the role of Professional Certification Institutions in improving the quality of Islamic higher education in Indonesia through a library research approach. This study focuses on three main points: (1) exploring the policies and theoretical concepts of LSP in the higher education quality assurance system; (2) identifying the contributions and challenges of LSP implementation in the Islamic university environment; and (3) formulating strategic recommendations for strengthening the competency-based certification system in Islamic universities. The argument is that the existence of LSPs that are professionally managed and integrated with an internal quality assurance system will be an essential catalyst in producing graduates who are superior, globally competitive, and have strong scientific and Islamic integrity.

METHOD

This research uses a library research approach, a research method that examines various scientific sources to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon without collecting field data (Zed, 2014). This approach was chosen because the study focused on analyzing the concepts, policies, and outcomes of previous research on the role of the Professional Certification Institutions (LSP) in improving the quality of Islamic higher education. Thus, research data is sourced from relevant literature, including laws and regulations, guidelines from official institutions, journal articles, academic books, research reports, and verified national and international scientific publications.

This type of research is qualitative-descriptive with a content analysis approach. This approach allows researchers to identify, classify, and interpret key themes across a wide range of literature on the certification of higher education competency and quality. Content analysis was chosen because it can

provide a deep understanding of the text by interpreting meaning, patterns, and relationships among concepts (Krippendorff, 2018). In this context, the researcher seeks to develop a theoretical construct that explains how LSP strengthens the quality assurance system in Islamic universities.

The data collection process was carried out through a literature search across various academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ, and SpringerLink. The keywords used include "Professional Certification Agency", "competency certification", "quality of higher education", "Islamic higher education", "quality assurance", and "employability". The search focused on literature published from 2015 to 2025 to ensure the data's relevance and novelty. From the initial search results, literature was selected based on the following inclusion criteria: sources relevant to the research topic, with academic credibility (published in accredited or internationally reputable journals), and that discuss competency certification in higher education. The exclusion criteria include non-academic sources, popular articles without a scientific basis, and documents whose authenticity cannot be verified.

Data analysis was carried out systematically by organizing all literature sources into three thematic categories: LSP policies and regulations, implementation practices in Islamic universities, and the relationship between professional certification and the quality of higher education. Each piece of literature is read in depth to identify patterns, key ideas, and connections between concepts. This process involves data reduction, content interpretation, and the synthesis of results to achieve a complete understanding of the topic under investigation (Bengtsson, 2016). In the interpretation stage, the researcher critically examines various views, identifies similarities and differences with previous research, and assesses their conceptual contributions to the development of the quality of Islamic higher education.

To ensure the validity of the data and the objectivity of the results, this study applies source triangulation by comparing information from various types of literature: normative (regulatory and policy), conceptual (theory and quality assurance model), and empirical (field research results). The analysis process is carried out recursively, moving back and forth between theory and literature data, so that the resulting interpretation is not speculative but grounded in a critical and contextual reading of academic sources (Bowen, 2009). In this way, the research results are expected to provide a substantial theoretical contribution and an argumentative basis for the development of professional certification policies in Islamic universities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this literature review show that the Professional Certification Institutions (LSP) has a strategic position within the Islamic higher education ecosystem, particularly in bridging the gap between academia and the world of work. LSP serves as an institution that ensures graduates' competence through a certification test mechanism aligned with national and

international standards. With professional certification, students receive not only a formal diploma but also proof of measurable, industry-recognized competence (BNSP, 2022). In this context, LSP is an essential instrument for strengthening graduates' employability and increasing the global competitiveness of Islamic universities.

Institutionally, the establishment of LSP in the Islamic university environment is driven by national regulations, such as Law Number 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower and Government Regulation Number 10 of 2018 concerning the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP). Based on this legal framework, universities can establish LSP-P1, which functions to certify the competencies of students and educators in the field of expertise taught. The presence of LSP on Islamic campuses is not only a form of compliance with regulations but also a manifestation of institutional responsibility in producing graduates who are competent, professional, and moral, in accordance with Islamic values.

The results of the literature review indicate that integrating the Islamic higher education curriculum with the professional certification system continues to pose various challenges. One of the main obstacles is the incompatibility between industrial competency standards and graduate learning outcomes designed in the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI). According to Zulkifli & Suyatno's (2021) research, there remains a gap between the theoretical competencies developed in Islamic universities and the practical skills required by the world of work. This is where LSP plays a strategic role in harmonizing the two domains by preparing a certification scheme tailored to the job market's needs.

Furthermore, LSP plays a role as a driver of quality culture in Islamic universities. The concept of quality culture in higher education refers to the integration of quality values across all aspects of campus management, from planning and implementation to evaluation (Harvey & Green, 1993). With the existence of LSP, each study program is encouraged to review the relevance of its curriculum to national competency standards, conduct competency-based training, and build an adaptive internal quality assurance system. This has implications for increasing the academic community's awareness that quality is not only a matter of accreditation administration but also part of the educational culture that must be maintained in an ongoing manner.

Other findings show that professional certification in Islamic universities also strengthens the external quality assurance system. Accreditation of study programs by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) or the Independent Accreditation Institute (LAM) now includes outcome-based education and indicators of graduate employability. The competency certificate issued by LSP is tangible evidence of output-based learning outcomes. Thus, the existence of LSPs indirectly supports improvements in institutional accreditation scores through indicators of graduates' relevance to industry needs (BAN-PT, 2021).

However, the study also found that the effectiveness of the LSP role is highly dependent on the managerial capacity and professionalism of the competency assessors. According to Putri et al. (2020), several universities still face human resource constraints, including a lack of BNSP-certified assessors, limited competency test facilities, and weak monitoring systems for certification results. This condition results in competency tests not being optimally implemented or fully integrated with the academic system. Therefore, a policy of capacity building and assessor training is needed to maintain the quality standards of certification implementation.

In addition to technical aspects, the spiritual and ethical dimensions of Islam are also significant differentiators in the implementation of LSP in Islamic universities. Professional certification in this environment not only assesses technical skills (hard skills) but also emphasizes moral competence and professionalism grounded in Islamic values such as trust, ihsan, and integrity. This concept aligns with the idea of integrative Islamic education, which views professional skills and spiritual values as a single unit (Abdullah, 2019). Thus, graduates of Islamic universities who are certified in competence are expected not only to excel in their skills but also to demonstrate a strong Islamic character in their professional work.

On the other hand, there is significant potential for synergy between LSPs and internal quality assurance institutions (LPMs) to build a sustainable quality improvement system. LSP can serve as a strategic partner to LPM in conducting competency-based evaluations, providing input on the curriculum, and following up on tracer study results with student competency development policies. This collaboration reinforces the principle of continuous quality improvement (CQI), a central pillar of the quality management system in modern higher education (Deming, 1986). If this synergy is managed effectively, Islamic universities can serve as a model for integrating academic and professional quality (Yudiawan & Himmah, 2023).

Empirically, case studies show that Islamic universities that successfully manage LSPs tend to experience improved institutional performance. For example, UIN Sunan Kalijaga and UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang reported an increase in graduate absorption and accreditation rankings after integrating professional certification into the academic curriculum (Hidayat & Fadhli, 2022). This confirms that LSP is not just an administrative unit, but a strategic component in the Islamic higher education system that supports accreditation, competitiveness, and the relevance of graduates to global needs.

However, this study's results also show the need to revitalize the LSP policy in the Islamic university environment. The government, through the Ministry of Religion and BNSP, needs to strengthen regulatory support, especially in LSP accreditation, budgeting, and the digitization of certification systems. With digitalization, certification can be implemented more transparently, efficiently, and integrated with the campus academic system. In addition, collaboration with industries grounded in Islamic values, such as Islamic financial institutions and zakat institutions, can open new professional

certification pathways that align with the specificities of Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

Overall, the results of this study confirm that the Professional Certification Institutions plays a catalyst in improving the quality of Islamic higher education. Its existence not only ensures graduates' competence but also strengthens internal and external quality assurance systems, increases the relevance of the curriculum, and expands graduate job opportunities. In the future, enhancing LSP capacity should focus on governance, industrial collaboration, and integrating Islamic values into the certification scheme to produce graduates who excel academically, professionally, and spiritually.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the Professional Certification Institutions (LSP) has a very strategic role in improving the quality of Islamic higher education in Indonesia. LSP is not only a competency-testing institution but also an integral part of the higher education quality assurance system, oriented towards excellence, relevance, and sustainability. The existence of LSP helps ensure that graduates of Islamic universities not only have academic abilities but also professional competencies aligned with industry and societal needs. Thus, professional certification is one of the essential instruments for bridging the gap between education and the world of work and for strengthening graduates' competitiveness at the national and global levels.

The strategic role of LSP in the context of Islamic universities also reflects a shift in the quality paradigm from simply meeting administrative standards to a competency-based, sustainable quality improvement system. Through certification activities, the campus is encouraged to continue improving the curriculum, strengthening relationships with industry, and instilling professionalism and integrity in students. More than that, LSP contributes to building a culture of quality in the academic environment, where every member of the community is encouraged to deliver the best performance in line with measurable standards. This strengthens the role of Islamic higher education as a center for the development of integrated knowledge, skills, and morality.

However, the effectiveness of the LSP role still faces several challenges, especially in human resources, governance, and system integration. The limitations of competency assessors, uneven testing facilities, and the lack of optimal alignment between the academic curriculum and industry standards are obstacles that need to be addressed immediately. Islamic universities need to systematically strengthen LSP's institutional capacity through training, assessor certification, and improvements to management systems. These efforts must be accompanied by stronger government policy support, including regulations, facilitation, and incentives, to develop certification institutions in the Islamic campus environment.

In addition to institutional strengthening, it is essential to foster harmonious integration between the professional certification system and Islamic values. Certification in Islamic colleges ideally assesses not only technical ability but also spiritual, ethical, and social responsibility. This approach makes graduates not only job-ready but also able to work with good morals, honesty, and a benefit-oriented mindset. In this context, LSP can be a strategic vehicle to instill Islamic values into modern professional practices, thereby producing intellectually superior and morally dignified human resources.

To strengthen this role, Islamic universities are recommended to: (1) increase the capacity and professionalism of assessors; (2) integrating the academic curriculum with the certification scheme; (3) develop an efficient and transparent digital-based certification system; (4) expanding cooperation with the industrial world and Islamic institutions; and (5) ensuring that the entire certification process reflects Islamic values. These measures will strengthen LSP's position as a key instrument in creating competent, adaptive, and characterful graduates.

Overall, the Professional Certification Institutions is an essential catalyst in transforming the quality of Islamic higher education. Through the synergy between professional competence, quality governance, and spiritual values, Islamic universities can build a relevant, superior, and globally competitive education system. LSP is not just a technical institution, but a symbol of commitment to the integrity, quality, and sustainability of Islamic education. With good management and continuous policy support, LSP has the potential to be the driving force for Islamic higher education reform towards a more professional, ethical order and make a real contribution to the progress of the ummah and the nation.

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