

Institutional Transformation Of Islamic Higher Education Institutions Based On Autonomy, Governance, Data, And Islamic Values

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ABSTRACT

Institutional transformation in Islamic higher education cannot be understood merely as organizational restructuring or compliance with governance documentation. It also concerns how institutions exercise authority, lead change, manage information, make decisions, and connect Islamic values with institutional practices. This study aims to analyze the mechanisms linking institutional autonomy, leadership, governance, data utilization, deliberation and quality assurance in the institutional transformation of STAI Sangatta Kutai Timur. The study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data sources include institutional leaders, departments and study programs, the Quality Assurance Unit, the governing foundation, observations of institutional activities, and documents such as the Statutes, organizational and working procedures, institutional development plans, strategic plans, operational plans, internal quality assurance documents, standard operating procedures, the official website, and the academic information system. The analysis focuses on five themes: autonomy, leadership, governance as practice, data-driven decision-making, and the integration of Islamic values. The available findings indicate that authority at STAI Sangatta is distributed hierarchically among the foundation, institutional leadership, departments, study programs, and supporting units; leadership operates through cross-unit coordination; governance is supported by institutional documents, quality systems, and information systems; and decision-making combines information, analysis, coordination, and deliberation. The conceptual contribution of the study is directed toward an institutional transformation model that positions data as an empirical basis, deliberation as a mechanism for collective consideration, and Islamic values as an ethical orientation. The model extends the understanding of Islamic education management from the integration of structures and functions toward an explanation of decision-making mechanisms that connect autonomy, governance, data, participation, and values.

Keyword : institutional autonomy, Islamic leadership, governance, data-driven governance, institutional transformation



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1. INTRODUCTION

Islamic higher education institutions face increasingly complex demands for change. Digitalization, quality requirements, changing student needs, accountability pressures, and the need for efficient resource management have positioned governance as a strategic component of institutional sustainability (Syarip et al., 2026; Mundzir, 2025). Research on universities moving toward data-driven organizations shows that data availability alone does not automatically produce better decisions. Institutions need data governance, organizational capacity, discussion about the purposes of data use, and space for human agency (Dunleavy & Margetts, 2025). These challenges become more complex in Islamic higher education because institutional governance must address both organizational effectiveness and moral accountability. Islamic leadership emphasizes amanah (trustworthiness), justice, honesty, and shura (consultation) as principles that can influence how leaders exercise authority (Ruhullah & Ushama, 2025). A systematic review of Islamic educational leadership indicates that principles such as amanah, sidq, adl, and shura are important components of Islamic leadership, while also highlighting the need for stronger empirical evidence concerning how these principles operate in organizational practice (Arar et al., 2022; Arar et al., 2026).

Studies of Islamic higher education governance in Indonesia have demonstrated the importance of structural change, transparency, professional financial management, and ethical values in the

movement toward good university governance. However, many studies focus on public higher education institutions or particular institutional transformations, such as transitions toward Public Service Agency arrangements (Fatmawati et al., 2024; Mundzir, 2025). Research on data governance in Indonesian higher education likewise indicates that data quality and implementation are influenced by internal and external organizational factors (Ramadhan et al., 2024). These findings create an opportunity to examine how data can be managed not merely as an administrative asset but also used together with deliberative processes and institutional values. This study is situated in the context of STAI Sangatta Kutai Timur. The research draft indicates that STAI Sangatta has five study programs within two departments and is undergoing institutional strengthening. In December 2025, the institution received a "Very Good" accreditation rating from BAN-PT, while the Islamic Education Management Study Program received a "Very Good" rating from LAMDIK. This context is important because institutional transformation should be examined not only through formal achievements but also through the mechanisms connecting authority, leadership, governance, information, decision-making, and quality assurance.

The research gap lies in three areas. First, studies of autonomy, leadership, governance, digitalization, decision-making, and quality assurance are often discussed as separate domains. Second, Islamic leadership literature frequently emphasizes leaders' characteristics and normative principles but does not always explain how these values are operationalized in institutional decisions. Third, data-driven governance studies emphasize data and data governance but rarely explain how data interacts with deliberation and Islamic values in local Islamic higher education contexts. Based on these gaps, this study offers novelty at the level of mechanisms rather than merely at the level of conceptual combination. It proposes that institutional transformation occurs through interaction among autonomy, leadership, governance as practice, data, deliberation, and Islamic values. Data functions as an empirical basis; deliberation functions as a deliberative mechanism; and amanah, adl, shura, maslahah, ihsan, and sidq function as ethical orientations in determining and evaluating decisions (Iskandar et al., 2026; Costantina et al., 2026). Thus, the proposed model does not position Islamic values as a normative addition after a decision has been made but as part of the decision-making process itself.

The research questions are: (1) how is institutional autonomy distributed and exercised at STAI Sangatta; (2) how does leadership connect authority across organizational levels; (3) how does governance operate as a practice rather than merely as a formal structure; (4) how are data, deliberation, and Islamic values used in decision-making; and (5) how do these mechanisms contribute to institutional transformation and quality assurance? The study aims to explain the institutional transformation mechanisms of STAI Sangatta through the relationships among autonomy, leadership, governance, data, deliberation, Islamic values, and quality assurance. Theoretically, the study seeks to extend Islamic Education Management by operationalizing Islamic values in governance practices. Practically, it provides a framework for evaluating whether digitalization, autonomy, and Islamic values actually influence decision-making processes rather than merely appearing in institutional documents. Institutional autonomy provides higher education units with room to adapt decisions to institutional needs. However, autonomy is always connected to accountability. Higher education governance literature demonstrates tension between institutional discretion and control mechanisms based on indicators, regulations, and accountability requirements. Therefore, autonomy should be understood as the capacity to exercise authority responsibly, not as unlimited freedom.

In the context of STAI Sangatta, this issue is more complex because the institution involves a governing foundation, institutional leaders, departments, study programs, and a quality assurance unit. The distribution of authority needs to be analyzed by identifying who has authority, what decisions are covered, how coordination occurs, and how decisions are accounted for. Islamic educational leadership can be understood as leadership that connects managerial capacity with ethical orientation. Amanah regulates the use of authority and resources. Adl guides fair treatment. Shura provides a mechanism for consultation. Sidq requires honesty in information and reporting. Maslahah directs decisions toward institutional and stakeholder benefit (Arodha, 2025; Abdurrahman, 2025). Recent scholarship also indicates that Islamic educational leadership should be understood as a relationship between spiritual foundations and the application of Islamic administrative principles in organizational contexts (Rahman, 2025). This study does not treat these values as a list of leadership characteristics. Its focus is on operationalization. The study therefore asks how amanah, adl, shura, maslahah, ihsan, and sidq influence procedures, choices, communication, resource allocation, and decision evaluation. Governance cannot

be adequately measured through the existence of Statutes, organizational procedures, strategic plans, standard operating procedures, or quality documents. Documents provide a formal framework, whereas governance as practice takes place through meetings, coordination, negotiation, service delivery, monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up.

This study analyzes governance through four main dimensions: transparency, accountability, participation, and justice. These dimensions are interdependent. Transparency provides information, participation broadens voices, accountability connects decisions with responsibility, and justice becomes a consideration in distributing benefits and burdens (Ahmed et al., 2025; Chen-Florea, 2026). Universities increasingly use data for monitoring, evaluation, planning, and decision-making. However, datafication creates issues concerning data quality, privacy, organizational capacity, and the boundary between data support and the replacement of human judgment (Lavazza & Farina, 2023). Therefore, data should be positioned as evidence that requires interpretation rather than as an automatic decision-maker. In Islamic education, this study connects data with deliberation. Deliberation provides space for the experiences and perspectives of affected parties. Islamic values provide ethical orientation. Data provides an empirical basis. Together, these elements form a decision mechanism that differs from both a purely technocratic approach and a purely normative approach. The integration-interconnection paradigm creates space to bring together religious knowledge, management science, institutional data, and educational realities. This approach is relevant because Islamic management should not be constructed only through a top-down process that translates norms into procedures. It should also read institutional realities from the bottom up and then connect those realities with Islamic principles. Within this framework, Islamic values are examined through actual practices in decision-making, resource management, problem solving, and service delivery.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The design was selected because the study focuses on mechanisms and processes rather than statistically measuring the level of autonomy or leadership quality (Knotts et al., 2022). The research case is STAI Sangatta Kutai Timur as an Islamic higher education institution undergoing institutional strengthening.

The informants listed in the draft include the Chairperson of STAI, Vice Chairperson I for Academic Affairs, Vice Chairperson II for Finance, Vice Chairperson III for Cooperation and Student Affairs, Heads of the Tarbiyah and Sharia Departments, Heads of the Islamic Education, Islamic Education Management, Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education, Sharia Economics, and Family Law Study Programs, the Head of the Quality Assurance Unit, and the Chairperson of the Sangatta Islamic Higher Education Foundation. This composition represents the perspectives of the governing body, institutional leaders, academic managers, student affairs, finance, and quality assurance.

Secondary data include the Statutes, organizational structure and working procedures, Institutional Development Plan, Strategic Plan, Operational Plan, Internal Quality Assurance System documents, standard operating procedures, academic documents, activity reports, the official STAI Sangatta website, and the academic information system. Primary data were obtained through interviews and observations of meetings, coordination activities, academic activities, administrative services, and governance activities as designed in the research draft.

Data analysis follows three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Coding focuses on six categories: (1) distribution of authority; (2) leadership practices; (3) governance; (4) data use; (5) deliberation and Islamic values; and (6) implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Source and technique triangulation are used to compare accounts across organizational levels and match interviews with observations and documents (Alsharari, 2024).

To strengthen the novelty, the analysis should not stop at identifying components. The researcher needs to trace concrete decision cases, such as academic, financial, human resource, student affairs, or quality decisions. Each decision case should be analyzed through the following questions: What data were used? Who was involved? How did deliberation occur? What values were considered? Who held final authority? How was the decision implemented? How was the outcome evaluated?

Data validation note: the available draft does not contain original interview transcripts or verbatim interview quotations. Therefore, the results section must be adjusted to the field evidence

before submission. Claims about decision mechanisms, the influence of Islamic values, or institutional change should be supported by informant quotations, observation findings, or relevant documents.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Institutional Autonomy, Leadership, and Governance Practices

STAI Sangatta is an Islamic higher education institution in East Kutai Regency with five study programs: Islamic Education, Islamic Education Management, Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education, Sharia Economics, and Family Law. The research draft records that the institution received a "Very Good" accreditation rating from BAN-PT in December 2025, while the Islamic Education Management Study Program received a "Very Good" rating from LAMDIK in December 2025. These achievements provide an important context for understanding the institution's ongoing strengthening process. However, accreditation outcomes alone cannot demonstrate institutional transformation. Transformation needs to be examined through the mechanisms that connect institutional structure, authority, leadership, governance, information systems, quality assurance, and decision-making practices.

The institutional framework of STAI Sangatta is supported by several formal instruments, including the Statutes, organizational and working procedures, Institutional Development Plan, Strategic Plan, Operational Plan, Internal Quality Assurance System, and standard operating procedures. These documents establish the formal structure within which institutional authority and responsibilities are exercised. Nevertheless, the existence of formal documents does not necessarily demonstrate how governance operates in everyday institutional practice. Governance becomes meaningful when formal structures are translated into coordination, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The findings indicate that institutional autonomy at STAI Sangatta operates through a differentiated distribution of authority among the governing foundation, institutional leadership, departments, study programs, and supporting units. The Chairperson provides strategic direction, Vice Chairpersons manage specific institutional functions, departments and study programs manage academic activities, and the Quality Assurance Unit performs quality assurance functions. Thus, autonomy does not mean organizational independence from the institutional structure. Instead, it operates within regulatory boundaries, institutional policies, quality standards, and accountability mechanisms.

Leadership plays an important role in connecting these different organizational levels. The Chairperson operates at the strategic level, Vice Chairpersons manage specific functional areas, Department Heads coordinate academic activities, and Study Program Heads manage operational academic affairs. This layered structure indicates that leadership functions not only as a mechanism for issuing instructions but also as a connecting mechanism between strategic decisions and implementation.

From the perspective of Islamic management, this leadership mechanism needs to be examined through the operationalization of amanah, adl, shura, maslahah, ihsan, and sidq. These values should not remain abstract normative principles. They need to be observable in institutional procedures and decisions. Amanah, for example, should be reflected in mechanisms for accountability in the use of institutional resources. Adl should be reflected in the fair distribution of workloads and opportunities. Shura should be visible in the involvement of affected stakeholders. Maslahah should influence the assessment of institutional and stakeholder benefits.

Governance at STAI Sangatta therefore needs to be understood as both a formal structure and an institutional practice. The website, academic information system, Internal Quality Assurance System, standard operating procedures, and institutional documents provide the formal infrastructure. Meetings, coordination, service delivery, monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up represent the practical dimension of governance.

Table 1. Institutional Autonomy, Leadership, and Governance Mechanisms at STAI Sangatta

Dimension	Institutional Practice	Main Function	Accountability Mechanism
Institutional autonomy	Distribution of authority among foundation, institution,	Provides decision-making space	Regulations, institutional

	departments, study programs, and supporting units		documents, and quality standards
Strategic leadership	Chairperson provides institutional direction	Connects institutional vision with strategic decisions	Institutional accountability
Functional leadership	Vice Chairpersons manage specific institutional areas	Translates strategic direction into sectoral programs	Reporting and coordination
Academic leadership	Departments and study programs manage academic activities	Implements academic policies	Academic monitoring and evaluation
Quality assurance	Quality Assurance Unit monitors and evaluates quality	Provides feedback for institutional improvement	Internal Quality Assurance System
Governance practice	Meetings, coordination, services, monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up	Converts formal structures into organizational practice	Documentation and institutional evaluation

The findings demonstrate a movement from governance as structure toward governance as practice. The central question is therefore not merely whether institutional procedures exist but whether those procedures shape actual decisions, who participates in the process, how authority is exercised, and how decisions are evaluated.

B. Data, Deliberation, Islamic Values, and Quality Assurance in Decision-Making

The findings indicate that decision-making at STAI Sangatta involves institutional information, academic data, coordination, and deliberation. The academic information system provides information that can support monitoring and evaluation. However, data do not automatically generate decisions. Institutional actors still need to analyze, interpret, discuss, and contextualize the information before reaching a decision.

This finding places human judgment at the center of data-driven governance. Data function as evidence rather than as an autonomous decision-maker. This position is consistent with the broader argument that higher education institutions need organizational capacity and human agency when developing data-driven governance (Komljenovic et al., 2025).

The model provides an analytical mechanism for connecting data-driven governance with Islamic management. Data provide the empirical basis. Analysis transforms raw information into relevant evidence. Deliberation provides space for the perspectives of institutional leaders, organizational units, and affected stakeholders. Islamic values provide ethical criteria. The decision is then implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

Quality assurance functions as an important feedback mechanism within this process. The Quality Assurance Unit does not merely evaluate compliance. Its role can extend to connecting evaluation results with subsequent institutional planning. This creates a cyclical relationship between decision-making and institutional learning.

Table 2. Data-Deliberative Decision-Making Mechanism

Stage	Main Activity	Function	Islamic Management Dimension
Data	Collection of institutional and academic information	Establishes empirical evidence	Sidq and accountability
Analysis	Interpretation of available data	Identifies problems and alternatives	Rational and evidence-based judgment
Deliberation	Consultation among relevant stakeholders	Integrates different perspectives	Shura
Value consideration	Assessment of ethical and institutional consequences	Ensures decisions reflect Islamic principles	Amanah, adl, maslahah, ihsan

Decision	Determination of institutional action	Establishes policy or program	Responsible authority
Implementation	Execution through organizational structures and SOPs	Converts decisions into action	Amanah
Monitoring	Observation of implementation	Identifies deviations and progress	Accountability
Evaluation	Assessment of outcomes	Determines effectiveness and improvement	Adl and maslahah
Follow-up	Revision or continuation of policy	Produces institutional learning	Continuous improvement

The proposed mechanism differs from a purely technocratic model because data do not become the sole determinant of decisions. It also differs from a purely normative model because Islamic values do not replace empirical evidence. Instead, data and Islamic values interact through deliberation.

However, the current research draft does not yet contain sufficient empirical evidence to claim that this sequence has been fully validated at STAI Sangatta. The final manuscript should therefore include at least two or three concrete institutional decision cases. Each case should identify the data used, actors involved, deliberative process, Islamic values considered, final decision, implementation process, and evaluation results. Without these cases, the model should be presented as an analytical or conceptual model derived from the findings, rather than as a fully validated empirical model.

C. Islamic Data-Deliberative Governance as a Model of Institutional Transformation

The findings provide a basis for developing the concept of Islamic Data-Deliberative Governance. The concept describes a governance mechanism that integrates institutional autonomy, leadership, data, deliberation, Islamic values, implementation, monitoring, and quality assurance.

The model responds to several limitations identified in previous studies. Autonomy is frequently discussed as decentralization or distribution of authority. Islamic leadership studies often focus on leaders' characteristics and normative values. Governance studies commonly emphasize formal structures and documents. Data-driven governance studies emphasize information systems and data quality. Meanwhile, deliberation is often treated as a normative Islamic principle rather than as an operational decision-making mechanism.

Table 3. Research Gap and Contribution of the Proposed Model

Aspect	Limitation in Previous Studies	Contribution of This Study
Autonomy	Often discussed as decentralization or authority distribution	Defines autonomy as decision-making space within accountability boundaries
Islamic leadership	Frequently emphasizes leadership characteristics and normative values	Operationalizes amanah, adl, shura, maslahah, ihsan, and sidq within decision-making
Governance	Often focuses on formal structures and documents	Connects governance as structure with governance as practice
Data	Often treated as an administrative or monitoring instrument	Positions data as evidence requiring interpretation and deliberation
Deliberation	Often presented as a normative principle	Positions deliberation as an institutional decision-making mechanism
Islamic values	Often function as normative legitimation	Positions Islamic values as ethical criteria in decisions and evaluation
Quality assurance	Often treated as a separate quality mechanism	Connects quality assurance with institutional decision-making and feedback
Institutional transformation	Often measured through structural change or quality outcomes	Explains transformation as a continuous cycle of authority, decision, implementation, evaluation, and improvement

The proposed model consists of nine interconnected stages:

1. Autonomy provides organizational units with sufficient space to identify institutional problems and respond to them.
2. Leadership converts identified problems into institutional decision agendas.
3. Data and information provide empirical evidence concerning institutional conditions.
4. Analysis transforms data into information relevant to decision-making.
5. Deliberation brings together perspectives from leaders, organizational units, and affected stakeholders.
6. Islamic values provide ethical criteria, particularly amanah, adl, shura, maslahah, ihsan, and sidq.
7. Decision-making establishes the institutional response.
8. Implementation, monitoring, and quality assurance translate the decision into practice and generate feedback.
9. Evaluation and follow-up produce institutional learning and inform subsequent decisions.

The model differs from two contrasting approaches. A purely technocratic approach may give excessive weight to data and indicators. A purely normative approach may emphasize Islamic principles without sufficiently examining empirical institutional conditions. Islamic Data-Deliberative Governance seeks to connect empirical evidence, stakeholder participation, and Islamic ethical considerations.

The model also provides a more operational interpretation of the integration-interconnection paradigm. Integration does not simply mean adding Islamic terminology to conventional management. Institutional reality becomes the starting point. Problems are identified through evidence. Relevant actors participate in deliberation. Islamic principles then guide ethical judgment and decision-making. The resulting decision returns to institutional practice and becomes subject to monitoring and evaluation.

This approach allows researchers to assess whether Islamic management produces observable differences in institutional practice. The relevant indicators include information transparency, stakeholder participation, accountability of authority, fairness in resource distribution, evidence-based decision-making, and evaluation of institutional consequences.

The proposed model therefore shifts the position of Islamic values from normative rhetoric to operational decision-making mechanisms.

D. Theoretical, Practical, and Future Research Implications

The study has theoretical implications for Islamic Education Management. It connects institutional autonomy, leadership, governance as practice, data governance, deliberation, Islamic values, and quality assurance within a single transformation mechanism. The contribution does not simply consist of adding several concepts to an existing framework. The more important contribution lies in explaining how these components interact during institutional decision-making.

At the practical level, STAI Sangatta can strengthen its governance system by clarifying authority, documenting decision processes, improving the use of institutional data, and integrating quality assurance with strategic decision-making.

Table 4. Practical Implications for Institutional Governance

Area	Recommended Institutional Action	Expected Outcome
Authority	Develop a clear authority matrix among the foundation, institution, departments, study programs, and quality assurance unit	Clearer decision boundaries
Decision documentation	Record data sources, participants, ethical considerations, decisions, and evaluation results	Greater accountability and traceability
Information systems	Develop SIAKAD and other systems beyond administrative functions	Stronger planning, monitoring, and evaluation
Deliberation	Base deliberation on relevant evidence and stakeholder perspectives	More informed and participatory decisions
Islamic values	Translate amanah, adl, shura, maslahah, ihsan, and sidq into observable indicators	More measurable Islamic governance practices

Quality assurance	Connect quality evaluation with planning and policy cycles	Continuous institutional improvement
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The model also creates opportunities for future research. Subsequent studies can test Islamic Data-Deliberative Governance in different Islamic higher education contexts. Comparative research could involve public Islamic universities, foundation-based private institutions, and higher education institutions affiliated with pesantren. Such studies could examine whether the relationships among data, deliberation, Islamic values, and institutional transformation remain consistent across different organizational contexts.

Quantitative research could also follow once measurable indicators for each construct have been developed. Future empirical studies should particularly examine whether the proposed decision-making mechanism improves accountability, stakeholder participation, decision quality, and institutional performance.

4. CONCLUSION

The institutional transformation of STAI Sangatta described in the research draft demonstrates relationships among the distribution of authority, layered leadership, governance, information systems, decision-making, and quality assurance. Autonomy operates within an accountability framework. Leadership connects strategic and operational levels. Governance connects authority with procedures, participation, transparency, and evaluation. Information systems provide data that can support decisions.

The main contribution of the study is the development of the Islamic Data-Deliberative Governance mechanism. The model positions data as an empirical basis, deliberation as a deliberative mechanism, and Islamic values as an ethical orientation. These elements lead to decision-making, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and institutional improvement.

Thus, Islamic management can be analyzed in more operational terms. The Islamic character of an institution cannot be demonstrated solely through its vision, rhetoric, or documents. It needs to be visible in how authority is exercised, information is processed, affected parties are involved, resources are allocated, conflicts are resolved, and policy outcomes are evaluated. To ensure the empirical contribution, the final manuscript needs to add interview quotations and concrete decision-case evidence that are not yet available in the current draft.

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