

Building bridges that change state Islamic universities in Indonesia toward international standard

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ABSTRACT

The learning organization is a strategic process for every university as a public service institution to improve its performance. Learning organizations have an essential role in linking past experiences to future improvements in changing State Islamic Universities in Indonesia to achieve international standards. This study aimed to describe the State Islamic University's learning organization profile in Indonesia and reveal its readiness towards international standards. This study used a survey approach, collecting data through closed questionnaires and open-ended questions involving 300 respondents consisting of lecturers and employees of the State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. The data analysis technique used descriptive statistics with a benchmark scale and explanations. The results showed that the average score on all learning organization variables was low, below the benchmark scale. This result was in line with lecturers and employees' perception that most of them (68%) expressed pessimism about universities' readiness to achieve international standards. In conclusion, the State Islamic University of Sunan Kalijaga has not fully become a learning organization as a bridge of change towards an international standard.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The change of Islamic higher education institutions from "institute" to "university" in Indonesia is a milestone that provides new hope. This decision to establish a modern Islamic university contributing to realizing an advanced and democratic Indonesia reflects the government and Muslim community's aspirations [1]. This change represents a serious effort to remove barriers, difficulties, and limitations in education; and raise academic and scientific standards in international forums [2]. Organizational change implies a radical change in the way members think and behave that indicates a transition from the status quo to the better [3]. Change is an essential process in an organization due to adaptation to challenges and opportunities that move quickly to increase its effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability [4]. Boyce [5] emphasized that university change is closely related to the learning organization, and the success of the learning organization depends on the conditions of collective learning in the institution. This change is the State Islamic Higher Education's primary capital to develop highly competitive institutions at the national and international levels. Abdullah [6] noted that the change of Islamic higher education from "institute" to "university" takes a long way. They started with trials, formulated academic foundations, established

educational and management orientations, improved academic governance and quality, and eventually became a university oriented towards international standards. In the last few decades, this vision has followed the internationalization program of higher education in various countries [7].

Any change requires a strategy based on the principle of "learn more from past experiences and learn from other institutions." There are five development strategies in transforming State Islamic Universities, namely: the development of intellectual and academic capacity, institutional capacity and human resources, entrepreneurship, managerial, and moral-spiritual development. However, educational change does not always run smoothly because of the many challenges, such as governance, autonomy, access, equity, quality, and internationalization [8]. The challenge comes from the higher education institutions themselves, which usually resist change [9]. On the other hand, stakeholders have not fully acknowledged the ability of state Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia to develop science and technology. They see it as nothing more than a religious teaching institution with lousy governance, unable to respond to change [10]. In the context of rapid change, intense competition, and technological advancement, State Islamic Universities are being obliged to become learning organizations. A learning organization's concept is a philosophy and tool for changing and improving sustainable organizations in this fast-changing world. Marquardt [11] underlines that by being a learning organization, they can learn from previous experiences and other institutions to become more adaptive and anticipate and predict their future.

The experts are concerned with various studies about learning organizations with multiple approaches and perspectives. They view that learning organizations are essential for every public service institution, including higher education institutions. In the context of rapid change, intense competition, and technological advancement, higher education institutions are being obliged to become learning organizations. Haamann and Basten [12] identified approaches to research on learning organizations, which he classified into three domains: people, processes, and technology. Senge published the concept of learning organizations in the 1990s via the book "Fifth Discipline," which had over one million copies sold and earned the title: 'Strategist of the Century' [13]. This concept emerged as a proactive and radical response to various renewing resources for competitive purposes. Learning organizations are systems that enable members to expand their capacity to achieve desired results, foster new and broad thinking patterns, provide freedom of shared aspirations, and continue its sustainability. The essence of this is to be skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge. Furthermore, it includes modifying its behavior to reflect newly acquired knowledge and insights in an organization.

According to Senge, a learning organization is a social discovery consisting of elements of scientific discipline. It is pivotal to learn, master and continuously practice these theories and techniques to achieve organizational learning [14]. There are five learning organizations' principles: personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning, and systems thinking. Learning organization concept includes three levels: individual (personal mastery), group (team learning), and organization (shared vision) [15]. Serrat [16] reveals that the implementation of team collaboration learning in learning organizations includes five levels: individual, team, cross-functional, operational, and strategic. Watkins and Marsick [17] formulated seven dimensions of learning organizations that are slightly different from the Senge concept. They categorized those seven dimensions into three levels: individual, team or group, and organizational level.

Learning organization research examines the pillars of a learning organization including a supportive environment; a concrete learning process; and leadership that reinforces learning. A supportive environment is where each member of the organization feels secure when handling different opinions and dares to admit mistakes. The organization can also accept the value of conflicting ideas, dare to take risks, explore new things, and take time to reflect on them. The critical elements in this pillar are psychological security, respect for differences, openness to new ideas, and time for reflection. In a concrete learning process, organizations have a formal approach to produce, collect, interpret, and disseminate information. They also have clear procedures and processes for experimenting with offering new things, gathering information about competitors, stakeholders, and technological development trends, identifying and solving problems; and developing its members' skills. The activities to achieve the learning organization's goals include systematic problem solving, experimentation with new approaches, learning from past experiences and others, and transferring knowledge. The third pillar that has a broad influence is leadership [18]. Prewitt [19] showed that leaders play the most critical role in determining the success or failure of learning organizations' efforts.

Various studies have revealed the significance of learning organization as a tool for organizational sustainability and improvement. Shahrabi [20] explains that learning and organizational agility are crucial factors needed to overcome change and utilize opportunities. Other research shows that learning organization increases efficiency, promotes discipline, and makes organizations more directed, therefore produces high performance [21]. Furthermore, being a learning organization that develops knowledge management is very important to change traditional views and increase rationality. The learning organization aims to activate and

strengthen the capacity of developing advanced higher education. It happened due to the strong positive impact of learning on organizational effectiveness [22]. Nguyen, *et al.* [23], in their research, revealed that learning organizations were successful because of spiritual leadership.

Among the existing organizational research, this study measures the organizational learning profile in the context of changes in public Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. Most of the researches on learning organizations have focused on organizational development for companies. In contrast, this research enriches new insights; how learning organizations are a bridge of change in the Islamic higher education organizations' growth.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Research type

This study used descriptive statistical survey types. This type of research is appropriate for measuring, describing, and exploring research variables. In general, the survey takes three stages: 1) Designing; 2) Selecting samples and distributing; and 3) Analyzing data and writing survey reports [24]. The design adopted a survey model to measure the learning organization's profile and compare it with a comparison scale.

2.2. Sample

The population used in this study consisted of lecturers and employees at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. It amounted to 1028 individuals comprising 574 lecturers and 454 employees. Furthermore, it included 300 individuals consisting of 158 lecturers and 142 employees as respondents. The sample calculation applied the Slovin Formula: $n=N/(1 + N.(e)^2)$ with a fault tolerance limit of 5%. The calculation process for determining the sample is as:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= N / (1 + N.(e)^2) \\ n &= 1028 / (1 + 1028 (5\%)^2) \\ n &= 1028 / (1 + 1028 (0.05)^2) \\ n &= 1028 / (1 + 1028 (0.0025)) \\ n &= 1028 / (1 + 2.57) \\ n &= 1028 / 3.57 \\ n &= 287.96 \text{ (rounded up to 288 respondents)} \end{aligned}$$

Due to proportional population representation considerations, we extended it to 300 respondents consisting of 158 lecturers and 142 employees. The lecturers and employees are the main subjects in building the culture of a learning organization. Furthermore, the three-building block of organizational learning from Garvin [25] referred to in this paper, is closely related to Indonesian higher learning institutions' two populations' tasks and responsibilities.

2.3. Data collection and instrument

Data collection used a survey questionnaire adopted from a learning organization research tool designed by Garvin, Edmonson, and Gino [26]. The questionnaire consists of open and closed-ended questions. The Likert Scale's closed questionnaire with a 1-7 has very harmful graduation to positive parameters. Furthermore, the details include: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=somewhat disagree, 4=neutral, 5=somewhat agree, 6=agree, and 7=strongly agree. The validity test which was carried out using Kendall Tau bivariate correlation found that the instrument was valid with $p\text{-value} < 0.05$. In addition, expert validity was also carried out by a professional lecturer from the faculty of social and humanities at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University approving that the survey was valid as the research instrument. The Learning Organization Survey by Garvin, Edmonson, and Gino [26] used in this research was in fact composed to be suitable for both profit-oriented organization and non-profit oriented organization.

Measurement of the learning organization's profile at the State Islamic University includes three pillars: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership that strengthen the learning process. Table 1 presents details of the questionnaire items.

Table 1. The details of the questionnaire item

Variable	Sub-component	Number of items
Supportive learning environment	Psychological safety	4
	Appreciation of differences	5
	Openness to new ideas	4
	Time for reflection	5
Concrete learning processes and practices	Experimentation	4
	Information collection	2
	Analysis	5
	Education and training	6
Leadership that reinforces learning	Information transfer	5
	Leadership that reinforces learning	8
Total question		48 items

We carried out a validity test to ensure that research instruments could measure and express studied variables correctly. This test was carried out through a sample test similar to the research respondents, involving lecturers and employees with 20 respondents. Furthermore, the questionnaire validity test was analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment correlation technique having the SPSS 17.0 tool. After comparing with correlation tables, the result obtained a significant level of 1%. If the correlation results are more significant than the numbers in the table, then the question items are valid. Conversely, if the number of correlation results is smaller than those in the table, then the question item is invalid.

Meanwhile, the open-ended question allows the respondent to give a free-form answer. They might fill out deeper and broader answers or clarify their responses in the closed questionnaire. The open questionnaire asks respondents to express their perceptions, obstacles, and predictions of State Islamic higher education's readiness towards attaining international standards.

2.4. Data analysis

This study used descriptive statistical analysis to present each variable's average score [27] and benchmarking [28]. Scoring the measurement results of learning organizations on each variable was carried out by calculating descriptive statistics. The formula is as: the score is the respondent's answer according to a scale of 1-7, multiplied by 100. The calculation of each element of the learning organization's score uses the "Qualtrics Survey Software" through the website los.hbs.edu, a survey site for learning organizations at Harvard Business School. Furthermore, the next step is benchmarking [29] to analyze a learning organization's profile by comparing the scores of measurement results with each pillar's benchmark and its components. Each element of the learning organization's pillar has a different score scale.

The analysis of open-ended questions included the stages of compilation, classification, rearrangement, interpretation, and conclusion. At the compilation stage, the writers record respondents' answers into written transcripts to thoroughly understand the data. Data classification is to select those relevant to the focus of the problem. Afterwards, the data interpretation is to find themes and meanings to make it possible to understand and see the overall measurement results in the learning organization profile.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study describes the learning organization profile's measurement results covering two perspectives: lecturers' learning organization and employees' attitudes. Each presents the results of measurement in the three pillars of the learning organization.

3.1. Lecturers' perspective

According to the lecturers' perspective, learning organizations' measurement includes three pillars of learning organizations: a supportive learning environment; a concrete learning process; and leadership that reinforces learning. Table 2 presents the results of measuring the learning organization's profile from the lecturer's perspective.

These results generally show that almost all learning organizations' variables tend to be low compared to the benchmark scale. It implies that State Islamic University has not fully implemented a supportive learning environment. The results of measuring the process variables and concrete learning practices are also at the percentage below the benchmark scale. Therefore, this indicates the weak implementation of this variable. The measurement results of leadership variables that reinforce learning show that the learning organization profile from the lecturers' perspective is in the lowest quartile. This trend also illustrates that leadership implementation, which strengthens learning at Islamic State University, is deficient.

Table 2. The learning organizations of lecturers' perspectives

No.	Component and subcomponents	Benchmark's score	Actual score	Categories
1.	Supportive learning environment			
	Psychological safety	76	71	Lower
	Appreciation of differences	64	59	Lower
	Openness to new ideas	90	67	Lower
	Time for reflection	50	57	Upper
	Composite	71	63.5	Lower
2.	Concrete learning processes and practices			
	Experimentation	71	56	Lower
	Information collection	80	56	Lower
	Analysis	71	64	Lower
	Education and training	80	57	Lower
	Information transfer	71	62	Lower
	Composite	74	59	Lower
3.	Leadership that reinforces learning			
	Composite	76	65	Lower

3.2. Employee's perspective

A university learning organization's profile from an employee's perspective also includes three variables: a supportive learning environment; concrete learning processes and practices; and leadership that reinforce learning. Table 3 presents the measurement results of learning organizations from an employee's perspective.

Table 3. The learning organizations of employee's perspective

No.	Component and subcomponents	Benchmark's score	Actual score	Categories
1.	Supportive learning environment			
	Psychological safety	76	70	Lower
	Appreciation of differences	64	60	Lower
	Openness to new ideas	90	66	Lower
	Time for reflection	50	64	Upper
	Composite	71	65	Lower
2.	Concrete learning processes and practices			
	Experimentation	71	63	Lower
	Information collection	80	63	Lower
	Analysis	71	62	Lower
	Education and training	80	64	Lower
	Information transfer	71	66	Lower
	Composite	74	63.6	Lower
3.	Leadership that reinforces learning			
	Composite	76	66	lower

The result generally shows the same average results on all learning organization variables, which tend to be low, compared to the benchmark scale. These are in line with lecturers' perspectives, which show the same tendency that the environment supporting learning at the State Islamic University remained stunted. The concrete learning process and practice variables' measurement also shows the organizational profiles in percentiles below the benchmark scale. These results indicate that this variable is still very weak and is under the benchmark scale. The measurement of leadership variables that strengthen learning also shows that the leadership pillar is the lowest quartile. Therefore, these results illustrate that leadership implementation, which maintains learning in public Islamic Universities, is still weak.

3.3. Lecturers' and employees' perceptions

Measurement of the profile of learning organizations in the perception of lecturers and employees at the State Islamic University in Indonesia shows the tendency of learning organizations as being weak. This result indicates that the university has not fully implemented the pillars of the learning organization consistently. The profile is in line with lecturers' and employees' perceptions regarding State Islamic Universities' readiness to transform into international standards. According to the open-ended questions presented to lecturers and employees, 203 respondents (68%) expressed pessimism about universities' eagerness to attain international standards. Conversely, respondents who were optimistic about the changes were only 78 respondents (26%), while 19 respondents (6%) were doubtful. However, despite not being confident, they expect opportunities and possibilities for universities to reach international standards if the universities want to change, learn more, and improve performance continuously.

Those who are optimistic about the transition from universities to international standards have good reasons. This perception is because the institution has some valuable experiences, such as changing from "Institute" to university in the early decades of 2000 and from a rigid bureaucratic system to a Public Service Agency (BLU) system, which was more flexible in 2007. Furthermore, universities received institutional accreditation from the Higher Education National Accreditation Board (BAN-PT) with level A. Several study programs received certifications from the ASEAN Quality Network Assurance (AUN-QA). According to them, all of these experiences are requisites for universities to improve service quality, performance, and learning to achieve international standards.

Meanwhile, those who are pessimistic about State Islamic higher education institutions' readiness to achieve international standards assume that several important factors do not support the institution's ability to change. Some of these factors are: 1) Bureaucratic culture which is still inherent in the governance of institutions and services; 2) Some lecturers and employees need a relatively long time to adapt to changes; 3) Motivation to learn tends to be low; 4) There are limitations to leadership in creating an environment that supports learning; 5) Institutional support in facilitating the professional development of lecturers and employees are inadequate; 6) Institutional management systems do not support coordination and harmony between fields; and lastly; 7) Supporting facilities and funds to improve better services are limited.

The environmental variables that support the learning show that the average score in the second quartile below the benchmark scale are median score. This profile indicates that learning organizations' principles that support lecturers and employees to propose creative ideas and share knowledge are not optimal. Besides, these results are not in line with learning organizations' main characteristics, such as creating an environment that supports knowledge sharing and learning systems [30]. The environment that enhances learning occurs when employees in an organization are psychologically stable. This environment is valued and given the freedom to have different views and feel comfortable expressing ideas, even though they are different from leaders. The essence of learning improves when individuals have divergent opinions; therefore, they are motivated to bring up new thoughts. Learning also occurs when the educational environment is open to new ideas, which provide opportunities for lecturers and employees to explore more breakthroughs. Malik, Danish, and Munir [31] reinforced that the immediate environment variable supporting organizational learning is psychological security and reflection time.

The results indicate that the university does not encourage lecturers and employees to exchange information as a basis for the learning process. The scores of information collection and education and training for lecturers and employees are also low. These results are not in line with the principles of learning organizations. They require formal processes to produce, collect, interpret, disseminate information, experiment with new things, gather information about competitors, stakeholders, technological trends, identify and solve problems, and develop employee skills [32]. Measurement of leadership profiles that strengthen learning is in the lowest quartile. These results indicate that organizational leadership does not play a role in promoting learning in organizations. However, the administration has a central role in implementing organizational learning—the small part of leadership in the organization shows that the university has not applied the principles of learning organizations effectively. Empirical research reveals the central role of leadership in learning organizations [33], [34]. Christenson and Walker [35] concluded that an indicator of leadership success is its ability to communicate organizational goals through an inspiring vision.

Higher education organizations' change aims to provide the institution's flexibility to be better prepared to adapt to a fast-changing environment and intense competition. White and Glickman [36] identified that higher education institutions' challenges in the contemporary era were quality testing, new technology, access, and curriculum innovation. Meanwhile, higher education institutions need to respond appropriately and enhance learning to produce globally competent graduates. Kreitner and Kinicki [37] examined the role of organizational attitudes and culture to support Kim, Watkins and Lu [38]. It confirmed that there is a relationship between learning culture and organizational performance dimensions. Therefore, higher education institutions need to pay extra attention to culture to improve students' quality and ability as a whole. Research confirms a significant relationship between learning organizations and organizational performance improvement. Jafari and Kalanaki [39] in their study at a university in Tehran, found a significant correlation between learning organizations and organizational readiness to change. In line with these results, Madsen, *et al.* [40] also discovered a correlation between implementing its learning organization and willingness to change. In the study on profit organizations in Southern California. He ascertained that the highest level of action for implementing learning organizations was leadership.

Leadership is an essential factor to be considered in the change of State Islamic higher education institutions. It is necessary to enhance learning culture, be more open to new ideas for information gathering, and improve education and training programs. Leadership in organizations needs to improve learning by encouraging sustainable practices and culture. Furthermore, organizational leadership's success is characterized by its ability to transform institutions into real learning organizations. Change in an

organizational context requires leadership that serves as an ideal leadership approach [41]. In their study, Ahmad, *et al.* [42] showed that action learning is fundamental to supporting organizations in an era of rapid global change. Flander and Klemenčič [43] emphasized the lecturers' role as an organizational component representing the driving force for implementing higher education internationalization policy. In Slovenia showed that lecturers' attitudes under university policies support educational institutions' internationalization.

The learning organization profile in educational institutions shows variations in strengths and limitations across specific fields. Keriahen's [44] at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Bengkulu University, revealed that the learning organization profile on average showed promising results for that of the State Islamic Universities. Meanwhile, the leadership subcomponents that strengthen learning tend to be the same in the lowest quartile. Studies at Qazvin University of Medical Sciences, Iran, also show a low learning organization profile [45]. The results obtained in this study are similar to those conducted at State Islamic Universities, Indonesia, which is yet to possess learning organizations' characteristics. This study contrasts with Berrio's research [46] at established universities in developed countries like Ohio State University Extension. Members of this university have a strong positive belief that it has a learning organization's characteristics, even though technology applications' sub-component still requires improvement.

Bui and Baruch [47] delivered an exciting discussion about applying the organizational learning concept in higher education institutions. This concept includes identifying antecedents, moderators, and results, such as personal values, motivation, individual learning, unique vision, training and development, organizational and group commitment, and leadership and organizational culture. Consequently, culture in higher education organizations has specificities compared to other organizations. There are at least four organizational culture models, such as collegial, managerial, development, and negotiation. Furthermore, three learning organizations are a supportive learning environment, a concrete learning process, and leadership reinforcing learning.

Referring to the results of theoretical and empirical studies, it was evident that the learning organization has a significant positive impact on an organization's ability and performance. Turi, *et al.* [48] revealed the relationship between learning organizations and emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence in improving academic performance, productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness. This study is in line with Edmonson in Salas, *et al.* [49], which states that "learning teams directly promote performance and indirectly promote organizational performance." Bui and Baruch [50] in their research at universities in the United Kingdom and Vietnam, concluded that employees who came from collectivist cultures were more committed to the process of being a learning organization compared to those from individualistic cultures. Marquardt [51] stated that by becoming a learning organization, it could learn from experiences and continuously reflect on being more adaptive, develop anticipatory actions, and predict the future.

The fundamental study of learning organizations in higher education institutions is not purposeful to criticize them but to identify weaknesses in each learning organization's pillars. Therefore, it provides the importance and fundamental considerations in making strategic decisions to develop institutions. This study's learning organization results indicate that the average score for all learning organization pillars is lower than the benchmark scale score. It implies that state Islamic higher education institutions have not fully implemented the concept of learning organizations. The learning organization profile is in line with lecturers' and employees' perceptions regarding the institution's readiness to attain international standards. This fact is one of the considerations that influence their perception of the enthusiasm of this institution. However, a small proportion of respondents showed optimism. However, they expect that the State Islamic higher education institutions can enhance learning, thus become genuine learning organizations. Being a learning organization is an essential factor in improving performance to achieve a competitive advantage [52]. The organization can adapt more quickly to various changes and be able to compete in the global era.

This research confirms that learning organizations significantly impact organizations' ability to transform into international standards. It explains that organizational experts emphasize the positive impact of being a learning organization consistently necessary for improving institutions' quality and performance. Afrin, *et al.* [53] emphasize that organizations concerned with learning and practice will improve quality. Furthermore, Alas and Vadi [54] showed two crucial factors determining learning organizations' profile, such as cultural change, education, and training. Organizational culture influenced learning organizations' profile ward change.

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University student organization's profile was below the benchmark score. These results indicate that this university has not fully implemented the pillars and characteristics of the learning organizations. This learning organization profile is in line with the perception of most lecturers and employees who are pessimistic about the university's readiness to achieve

international standards. Thus, the State Islamic higher education institution's change from "institute" does not reflect the institution's changes as a learning organization. Changing a university to a higher level requires learning more from its experience and other institutions to improve quality, performance, and competitiveness towards an international university. For this reason, being a good learning organization is a bridge to change from the present to a more advanced future.

The implication of this study is that university leaders as policy makers as well as lecturer and employee must work hard for continuous improvement. This improvement focuses on strengthening leadership, a culture of service quality, a conducive learning environment and academic improvement in accordance with international standards.

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