

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION (AN ANALYSIS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDEPENDENT CAMPUS)

Muhamad Anggung Manumanoso Prasetyo^{1*}, Sukatin²

¹Institut Agama Islam Negeri Lhokseumawe, Indonesia

²Institut Agama Islam Nusantara Batang Hari Jambi, Indonesia

¹anggung@iainlhokseumawe.ac.id, ²sukatin@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract

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The lack of focus on real business practices and intensive industry partnerships is a major weakness in the current entrepreneurship model at Islamic Higher Education institutions. This study aims to identify an ideal model of entrepreneurship education in higher education. It adopts a qualitative paradigm with a descriptive survey technique, focusing on the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe. This study shows that entrepreneurship education in higher education builds an adaptive ecosystem that enhances graduates' skills, character, and competitiveness, particularly through the Islamic Entrepreneurial Campus and the Independent Learning Independent Campus program. The novelty of this research lies in the integration of the Independent Learning concept with a practical and collaborative entrepreneurship model, emphasizing the development of hard and soft skills aligned with real industry needs. This model introduces curriculum innovation, business partnerships, and direct business activities by students, thereby strengthening market readiness, fostering a culture of innovation, and helping to address unemployment through a holistic and applicable approach. In conclusion, the Independent Learning Independent Campus program supports innovative entrepreneurship programs through entrepreneurial leadership, formal and informal learning, and campus-community partnerships to enhance economic growth and social welfare.

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A. INTRODUCTION

In 2018, the Global Entrepreneurship Index (GEI) rated entrepreneurship in Indonesia with a score of 21 percent, while the IDN Research Institute (2019) reported that 69.1 percent of Indonesian millennials have an interest in entrepreneurship (Acs et al., 2017; Satriadi et al., 2022). In the education sector, the gap continues to widen between the labor demand of 200,000 to 400,000 workers and the 1,200,000 university graduates each year. Meanwhile, data from August 2023 recorded 7.86 million unemployed people with an unemployment rate of 5.32 percent (Republika.co.id, 2022; DPR RI, 2023; katadata.co.id, 2023; Bps.go.id, 2023). One possible solution is to develop human resources with an entrepreneurial mindset (Aisyah

& Saputra, 2021; Febransyah & Camelia Goni, 2022).

Superior human resources will make Indonesia more competitive and able to compete with developed countries (Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021). Indonesia responds to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution through the Making Indonesia 4.0 program, which focuses on improving the quality of human resources through entrepreneurship and developing business units in higher education institutions to produce globally competitive graduates (Anjum et al., 2021; Tamprateep et al., 2019). Human resource development will have a significant impact if supported by the creation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem capable of opening job opportunities, considering the government's limited capacity (Prasetyo et al., 2020; Sitaridis & Kitsios, 2020).

Developing an entrepreneurial mindset is increasingly complex due to conservative parental paradigms that consider entrepreneurship not to guarantee success, even though entrepreneurship is becoming more important at various education levels (Prasetyo & Al Qadri, 2023). Research on entrepreneurship, such as that conducted by Sutanto, shows a relationship between community roles and entrepreneurship education (Sutanto & Nurrachman, 2018). Meanwhile, studies by Budiyo and Mubarak highlight the role of Islamic boarding schools in fostering independence and an entrepreneurial mindset (Budiyo, 2017; Chotimah, 2015; Mubarak, 2018). On the other hand, Cahyo researched entrepreneurship related to human resource capacity (Cahyo et al., 2021; Rashid, 2019), entrepreneurship and leadership (Coker et al., 2017; Komives & Wagner, 2016), as well as entrepreneurship and innovation (Hisrich & Kearney, 2014).

The launch of the Merdeka Belajar program is considered a strategic solution to improve the quality of learning in higher education. Makarim emphasizes that educators must first internalize freedom of thought before it can be instilled in students (Tohir & Tinggi, 2020). Although there is still confusion in understanding the concept of entrepreneurship, institutional leaders strive to build a supportive ecosystem. Challenges also arise from the presence of entrepreneur-managers who are often not accommodated by the culture of research university organizations (Hannon, 2023; Birds, 2014; O'Connor & Reed, 2018). Best practices in higher education include competency-based curricula, adequate infrastructure, and trained teaching staff (Flores Bazán et al., 2024). To produce innovative graduates, aspects of creativity, initiative, and entrepreneurship must be instilled (Khumalo & du Plessis, 2024), supported by appropriate institutional structures (Rahman & Day, 2014; Nwosu et al., 2023).

Research shows that Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTI) in Malaysia successfully integrate Islamic and modern knowledge, producing balanced graduates who contribute to national development, especially in governance, curriculum, teaching, and research (Idris et al., 2019). In Aceh, an Islamic Entrepreneurship Education (IEE) model has been developed, combining inter-curricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities to enhance the three pillars of higher education: education, research, and community service (Lailatussaadah et al., 2023). Studies in Indonesia and Saudi Arabia reveal that entrepreneurship education, self-efficacy, and the need for achievement significantly influence students' entrepreneurial intentions (Baidi & Suyatno, 2018). Furthermore, in Pakistan, non-Islamic business students tend to have higher entrepreneurial intentions than Islamic business students (Shah et al., 2022). Other factors, such as personal background, entrepreneurial attitudes, as well as family and university support, also play important roles in shaping entrepreneurial intentions (Aloulou, 2016).

The research gap lies in the differing focus and approach between entrepreneurship programs in Indonesian higher education through the Merdeka Campus initiative and entrepreneurship models in Islamic Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) in Malaysia and Aceh. The Merdeka Campus emphasizes building a practical and collaborative entrepreneurial ecosystem with industry partners, alongside developing students' soft and hard skills through direct business experience. In contrast, the models in Malaysian and Acehnese IHEIs prioritize the integration of Islamic and modern knowledge through academic activities, both inter-, co-, and extracurricular, without a strong emphasis on real business practice or intensive industry partnerships. Consequently, these IHEI models lack comprehensive entrepreneurial ecosystem implementation and direct experiential learning. This study aims to analyze entrepreneurship models that integrate the Merdeka Belajar concept with a practical and collaborative approach involving universities, industry, and communities, to develop a holistic entrepreneurial ecosystem. Such an ecosystem is intended to enhance students' readiness and motivation to become entrepreneurs while ensuring relevance to labor market demands and industry needs.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive survey technique to explore and understand the phenomenon of entrepreneurship within the higher education environment, specifically at the State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe. The research site was chosen because this campus has an active and relevant entrepreneurship program aimed at enhancing students' entrepreneurial competencies. The research subjects consist of several lecturers who are directly involved in managing and developing the entrepreneurship program. The selection of lecturers was carried out using purposive sampling, based on their experience and involvement in the program, ensuring that the data obtained comes from competent sources who deeply understand the research context. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection technique, with an interview guide prepared beforehand to explore in depth the implementation of the entrepreneurship program, the challenges faced, and the development strategies. This method allows flexibility in interaction, enabling informants to provide more open and rich information.

Data processing was conducted systematically in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction aims to filter and focus on relevant information, while data presentation serves to organize findings to be easier to understand and analyze. The final stage, conclusion drawing, involves identifying patterns and relationships within the data to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the entrepreneurship program. To ensure data validity, this study used source triangulation by comparing interview results from various lecturers. This approach aims to verify the accuracy and consistency of the information, reducing potential bias and data errors. Thus, this study is able to produce an in-depth and reliable analysis of the implementation of the entrepreneurship program in the higher education institution.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Entrepreneurship in Higher Education

Higher education transformation is carried out through the Merdeka Campus program. One of the indicators of the successful creation of a "Merdeka Belajar" ecosystem is



entrepreneurship education. This is in line with the need for universities to adopt new higher education models responsive to the demands of the industrial world (World Economic Forum, 2009). The entrepreneurship program differs from other educational standards as it requires a well-coordinated system between the components of higher education institutions (Seneler et al., 2019). Entrepreneurship is a model designed to stimulate individuals to perform better. Micro, small, and medium enterprises have shown resilience in economic crises. Therefore, in higher education, the entrepreneurial spirit needs to be developed so that universities have business units to generate profits, revitalize institutions, and create assets and endowments for them (David Audretsch et al., 2016). The OECD survey highlights six dimensions that shape the entrepreneurial culture in universities: curriculum integration and program scope; entrepreneurship program analysis and planning; characteristics and models of entrepreneurship programs; program financing; and evaluation of entrepreneurship programs (Hisrich & Kearney, 2014; Jencks et al., 2017).

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has revealed surprising findings that university graduates in Indonesia are unable to meet market demands because they lack sufficient work experience. They are preoccupied with theory, without enough practical experience. As a result, the quality of graduates does not match the job market's needs. Entrepreneurs manage, organize, and are ready to bear their business risks. The Ministry of Education launched the entrepreneurship program for students as a response to the high unemployment rate among students, specifically university graduates. Data from the Central Statistics Agency in Indonesia showed that the number of unemployed graduates reached up to 360,000 people in 2013.

This presents a significant gap and raises many questions for some. Entrepreneurship education is an idea to enhance competencies, skills, and values needed to recognize business opportunities, manage, and start new businesses. Essentially, entrepreneurship education aims to improve students' life skills (Wiyono et al., 2019). The entrepreneurial spirit within the younger generation is a powerful force in boosting the country's economy. Entrepreneurs play a role in determining national progress, as seen in advanced countries like Japan, the United States, Singapore, and others. Islamic higher education institutions must establish an Islamic Business and Entrepreneurship Development Institute. The presence of LPKBI will open a platform for strengthening and developing Islamic entrepreneurship on campus. Students and lecturers can also participate in entrepreneurship workshops, soft skill training, such as event organizing, and other training programs. Higher education institutions need to evaluate the entrepreneurship programs launched by university leaders and identify opportunities for applying an entrepreneurship model that highlights the concept of Islam, known as the Islamic Entrepreneurial Campus. With Indonesia's majority Muslim population, developing entrepreneurship based on the Islamic Entrepreneurial Campus concept is an important and promising opportunity.

The governance of higher education institutions is no longer rigid and bureaucratic; universities can become entrepreneurial institutions and organizations that can harness the potential of their resources. Students and lecturers should be integrated with business institutions, industries, and communities through the renewal and introduction of knowledge in collaboration with industry. This aligns with the launch of Merdeka Belajar at the Merdeka Campus. As future national leaders, students are expected to turn this opportunity

into a chance to produce goods and services using resources and technology wisely. Furthermore, a commitment between lecturers, students, and university staff is required to implement Merdeka Campus through support, enthusiasm, or encouragement in entrepreneurship.

The seriousness of higher education institutions in developing Merdeka Campus is a noble mission to create or produce a generation with an entrepreneurial spirit. Several things must be implemented to support the Islamic Entrepreneurial University in the Merdeka Campus program, including creating an integrated entrepreneurship curriculum, improving human resources, establishing partnerships with businesses or having business partners, creating student-run businesses, and collaborating with financial institutions. Entrepreneurship education has the potential to generate a more profound understanding than other types of knowledge because it requires action and practice. Higher education institutions that focus on developing entrepreneurship have several distinguishing indicators compared to other institutions.

The difference between general universities and those focusing on entrepreneurship is significant. Entrepreneurship education has the potential to influence the personality characteristics of an entrepreneur. This includes the ability to take risks, attitude and behavior, need for achievement, and skills in controlling the environment. Entrepreneurship education starts by focusing on developing an entrepreneur's personality, where the ability to assess situations and identify opportunities becomes a challenge an entrepreneur must face in difficult situations (Humphrey et al., 2022). Entrepreneurship education indirectly shapes students' critical thinking skills in facing industry challenges.

2. Entrepreneurship Model in the Context of Merdeka Belajar

In the current millennial era, the job market demands are increasingly competitive. Entrepreneurs not only compete in business but also need to build personal branding, a trend that society, particularly students, is starting to adopt. The issue at hand today is the need for creativity among students/graduates and not relying too much on existing job markets. Ideally, students should be able to create job opportunities by keeping up with the times. The development of an entrepreneurial spirit occurs through education, but one of the underlying reasons for the lack of entrepreneurial motivation among students is the overly theoretical learning model. This is coupled with a lack of practical experience, leading to passive students who miss opportunities to explore their creativity.

The entrepreneurship program within the Merdeka Campus aims to help students interested in entrepreneurship develop their businesses earlier and in a guided manner. Additionally, entrepreneurship activities within the Merdeka Campus program can address the issue of unemployment among university graduates. The entrepreneurship development program employs several strategies, including: Enhancing students' entrepreneurial skills through collaborative programs between institutions and business practitioners and guiding students to embed entrepreneurial values comprehensively and integrally through various profitable economic activities that the general public can exemplify. Cultivating available resources from related institutions. The government also plays a vital role in fostering and providing facilities, including student capital (Arifin, 2020; Rashid, 2019). Millennial students are expected to master business trends, keep up with the times, and contribute to

business development by generating contemporary ideas. The skills they possess should be continuously improved in line with business needs and the mindset required to realize entrepreneurship.

Many students feel ashamed or insecure about entrepreneurship. However, this is something that should be proud of and valued. The results they achieve can be used for living expenses while studying and other needs. Ultimately, their mindset must be transformed for the better.

Entrepreneurship has become an essential discipline that must be shaped, studied, and taught to individuals. The desired outcomes are related to material gains or customer satisfaction and the impact on the surrounding community. Therefore, entrepreneurship development should be well-programmed to produce competitive and highly competent entrepreneurs. Evaluations of entrepreneurship programs show that alignment between needs, participation, students' knowledge, motivation, characteristics, and resources such as funding and facilities is closely linked to the success of entrepreneurship programs. Entrepreneurship training can be conducted formally or informally, encompassing theoretical and practical learning, with creative training methods significantly affecting the intended outcomes. Higher education institutions can collaborate with business practitioners from the industry and the job market.

Factors supporting the realization of entrepreneurship programs include good student motivation and positive responses from stakeholders. Furthermore, sufficient funding and facilities also play a significant role in the sustainability of entrepreneurship programs. Competent entrepreneurs should first receive entrepreneurship education from lecturers or instructors so that the program can be appropriately implemented, both before and during the operation of the business. The high global business competition can create uncertainties regarding business development, affecting student entrepreneurs' performance. Therefore, educational institutions like Merdeka Campus must properly prepare students for these challenges.

Entrepreneurship development programs should include creativity and innovation skills, the ability to identify opportunities, and an openness to change and challenges (Arteaga & Hyland, 2013; Carayannis, 2020). Entrepreneurs with innovation and creativity will find it much easier to face global competition. Entrepreneurship requires technical skills (hard skills) and soft skills, or interpersonal skills (McGrath & Powell, 2016; Santosa & Dwi, 2018). Their research explains that individuals living harmoniously with others in society must develop tolerance, empathy, ethics, other psychological traits, and technical skills. In line with the entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurs must be skilled in technical fields and soft skills. This will enable their entrepreneurial competence to be considered in competitive environments (Manara, 2014). The innovations made by higher education institutions aim to prepare students for the global competition they will face after graduation. One of the entrepreneurship goals in the Merdeka Campus program is to enhance students' life skills to develop independence, mental resilience, and competitiveness.

3. Entrepreneurship Program Process in the Merdeka Campus

A fundamental aspect of implementing an entrepreneurship program is fostering an entrepreneurial culture. This naturally leads to the development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem built on several key pillars, supported by three main components: attitudes

toward entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skills, and entrepreneurial aspirations. For a developing economy to thrive, these pillars must be equally strong and balanced, requiring continuous attention, ongoing improvement, and careful maintenance. The entrepreneurship program under the Merdeka Campus initiative follows a framework set by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud RI). Students interested in participating must follow a structured process, beginning with registration for the program. After registering, students prepare an entrepreneurship proposal for their campus activities, guided by lecturers or instructors throughout the development phase. Upon completion, proposals are assessed, and students receive recognition in the form of course credits. Finally, students are allowed to run their businesses for one to two semesters, gaining practical experience as part of their academic journey.

Entrepreneurship development requires focused attention on talents, skills, and attitudes that cultivate entrepreneurial traits, encouraging operations beyond rigid regulations. This development targets university students explicitly. Key activities in higher education entrepreneurship are grouped into three categories: (1) skills development, (2) individual social skills enhancement, and (3) personal skills necessary for starting and managing a business, including financial management. The program aims to prepare students to become competitive entrepreneurs by developing both their hard and soft skills. Within the Merdeka Campus framework, entrepreneurship education fosters an entrepreneurial mindset, entrepreneurial skills, and practical experience, all contributing positively to student growth. Entrepreneurial leaders are encouraged to remain flexible and design management systems that allow freedom for creativity and innovation. According to the research's conceptual model, entrepreneurship development will be realized through core management functions, which serve as the foundation for effectively nurturing and guiding students' entrepreneurial capacities throughout their academic journey.

Table 1: Key Features of Higher Education Entrepreneurship Programs

| No | Program Type | General Characteristics |
|----|------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | General Entrepreneurship Lecture | a. Socialization of curriculum structure. b. Entrepreneurship clinic as an initial assessment. c. Paradigm shift with motivation and confidence toward industry needs. |
| 2 | Entrepreneurship Learning Program | a. A learning program combined with work experience implemented in a business unit, allowing students to gain entrepreneurial experience. b. Integration of student activities with production practices in selected MSMEs. c. Building entrepreneurial character encompassing knowledge, individual skills, motivation, and values. d. Learning to understand customer voice (VOC) and meeting needs through consumer involvement. |
| 3 | Entrepreneurship Competition Event | a. Activities aimed at providing business capital assistance to students under specific conditions determined by the campus. b. Empowering students through leadership development and entrepreneurship practice in sectors such as food and beverages, service industries, creative industries, technology industries, and trade. |
| 4 | Entrepreneurship Expo | a. An event held periodically. b. The expo involves students and serves as a branding effort for the products owned by students. |

The development of entrepreneurship skills is influenced not only by managerial

factors but also by the students' motivation. Individual behavior that shapes students' motivation is based on their perspective on the prospects of entrepreneurship. This perspective is reflected in their evaluation of whether becoming an entrepreneur is beneficial (positive) or detrimental (negative) (Fahmayanti, 2016; Handayati et al., 2021).

The implementation of entrepreneurship development is also determined by social networks, which can affect students' decisions to pursue a career as entrepreneurs. Social networks act as facilitators in fostering an entrepreneurial spirit, found in the external environment of the campus (family and community). In this context, universities build relationships with external stakeholders, such as MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises), business practitioners, educational institutions, and government offices.

Research has identified a model for implementing entrepreneurship education at Islamic universities, focused on fulfilling several factors for entrepreneurship development. These include identifying visionary leadership styles and entrepreneurship, efforts to build partnerships with external parties (government, industry), and universities offering entrepreneurship programs based on student ideas and initiatives.

In a systematic manner (leadership, faculty, and students), universities commit to sustainable programs. They also demonstrate a commitment with significant financial resources, including allocations for enhancing entrepreneurial resources. Furthermore, universities show organizational commitment by continuing innovations in the curriculum and entrepreneurship programs. Another critical factor is attention to the alignment of infrastructure (facilities and infrastructure) with the entrepreneurial organization. In recent years, universities have established business units and business incubators. The actualization of programs focusing on resource development or the physical improvement of facilities is evidence of the campus's commitment to extending business development efforts and entrepreneurship growth.

D. CONCLUSION

The integration of the Independent Learning program with entrepreneurship development in higher education, particularly in Islamic higher education institutions, demonstrates significant uniqueness and novelty. This uniqueness lies in the development of an entrepreneurship model based on Islamic values through the establishment of the Islamic Business and Entrepreneurship Development Institute. This initiative has not been widely implemented in universities and represents an important breakthrough in shaping entrepreneurial character that is religious, ethical, and professional. The model also addresses current issues such as the high unemployment rate among graduates, lack of work experience, and weak practical skills of students in facing the job market and industry. Entrepreneurship development is carried out comprehensively and systematically through three main pillars: attitude, skills, and aspiration. These three pillars are integrated into the education curriculum, entrepreneurship training, hands-on business practice, and collaboration with industries and micro, small, and medium enterprises. In addition, the program emphasizes strengthening students' soft skills and life skills to produce graduates who are independent, creative, innovative, and globally competitive. Thus, entrepreneurship education within the framework of the Independent Learning program does not merely serve as a curriculum supplement but becomes a core part of the transformation of higher

education institutions into adaptive, productive institutions that are capable of making fundamental contributions to economic development and societal well-being.

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