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ISLAMIC LEADERSHIP, WORK CULTURE, AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN ENHANCING THE INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION OF ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini meneliti pengaruh kepemimpinan Islami dan budaya kerja terhadap reputasi internasional lembaga pendidikan tinggi Islam, dengan keterlibatan karyawan sebagai variabel mediasi. Menggunakan desain kuantitatif deskriptif dan analisis PLS-SEM terhadap 555 responden dari lima universitas negeri Islam di Indonesia, temuan menunjukkan bahwa kepemimpinan dan budaya kerja secara tidak langsung memengaruhi reputasi internasional melalui keterlibatan karyawan. Hasil ini menyoroti pentingnya strategis dalam membina kepemimpinan etis, budaya kerja yang mendukung, dan karyawan yang terlibat untuk memperkuat kapasitas institusional dan pengakuan global. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Kepemimpinan Islam dan Budaya Kerja Islam tidak memiliki dampak langsung pada status reputasi internasional, keduanya secara signifikan memengaruhinya melalui keterlibatan karyawan sebagai variabel mediasi. Temuan ini berkontribusi pada upaya untuk memperkuat keterlibatan karyawan dalam meningkatkan kapasitas organisasi dalam lembaga pendidikan Islam. Strategi yang digunakan berorientasi pada peran kepemimpinan, budaya kerja Islam, dan keterlibatan karyawan yang dapat memperbaiki dan meningkatkan reputasi lembaga secara global.

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Keywords:

*Islamic leadership;
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ABSTRACTS

This study examines the influence of Islamic leadership and work culture on the international reputation of Islamic higher education institutions, with employee engagement as a mediating variable. Using a descriptive quantitative design and PLS-SEM analysis of 555 respondents from five Indonesian state Islamic universities, findings reveal that leadership and work culture indirectly affect international reputation through employee engagement. These results highlight the strategic importance of fostering ethical leadership, a supportive work culture, and engaged employees to strengthen institutional capacity and global recognition.

The findings reveal that although Islamic Leadership and Islamic Work Culture do not exert a direct effect on international reputation status, both variables significantly influence it indirectly through Employee Engagement as a mediator. These results contribute to strengthening employee engagement as a strategic component in enhancing organizational capacity within Islamic educational institutions. The strategies derived from this study underscore the importance of leadership roles, Islamic work culture, and employee engagement in improving and sustaining the global reputation of these institutions.

A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic Leadership and Islamic Work Culture serve as foundational pillars of ethical, moral, and spiritual principles derived from the Qur'an and Hadith. Islamic values—emphasizing justice, trust, and collective responsibility constitute essential character components that can be manifested in a healthy and conducive educational work environment, thereby establishing a robust and effective organizational management framework. Within the context of Islamic education, an effective framework that optimizes leadership roles and resource management requires well-designed strategies supported by competent human capital. Integrating ethical, moral, and spiritual principles into modern management practices can enhance ethical decision-making processes and foster a positive organizational culture. Consequently, Islamic leadership and work culture play a crucial role in promoting employee engagement, collaboration, and productivity in educational institutions that strive for international recognition.

Globally, higher education institutions are evaluated on their ability to produce graduates with global competitiveness, promote international collaboration, and contribute to the global knowledge economy. This suggests the need for a balanced focus on both academic excellence and spiritual values within Islamic higher education institutions. For instance, State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) require innovative and transformational leadership supported by a conducive organizational culture. Leadership within Islamic educational institutions is essential for integrating Islamic values into modern educational practices while creating an environment that cultivates both intellectual and spiritual growth. This dual mandate can be accomplished through various strategies, including curriculum development, leadership models, and community engagement that reinforce institutional goals.

An Islamic work culture also functions as a crucial medium for shaping communication patterns and organizational actions necessary to achieve sustainable development across ecological, economic, and social dimensions (Packalen, 2010).

Culture encompasses two critical elements, traditional and anthropological, which must be prioritized in shaping policies and institutional practices (Packalen, 2010). Organizational culture, largely anthropological in nature, can be understood through Schein's (1999/2010) definition that views culture as the sum of shared assumptions learned by a group over the course of its history. In Islamic higher education institutions, cultivating organizational culture becomes particularly significant due to the intangible nature of services offered and the subjective perceptions of service quality (Christou, 2003).

Moreover, the increasingly competitive environment in the higher education sector and its rising importance for national and local economies have made organizational culture a collective priority, as managers seek competitive advantage (Kandampully & Hu, 2007), especially in securing international reputation. Within PTKIN, the integration of modern academic practices with Islamic principles is central to sustaining academic excellence while preserving Islamic heritage. Leadership, work culture, and employee engagement form the institutional core where religious values intersect with scientific inquiry. In addition to leadership and cultural aspects, curriculum design should enable students to receive holistic education that equips them to address contemporary challenges while grounding them in their cultural and spiritual heritage.

Integrating Islamic values into leadership practices, work culture, and employee engagement can be achieved through strategic frameworks aligned with Islamic teachings and modern educational demands (Sulfani, 2023). One such strategy includes implementing effective governance practices that uphold Islamic values while meeting global development goals in research, teaching, and social impact, ultimately producing high-quality education and graduates capable of contributing to global sustainable development (Budiyono, 2024). These dynamics create both unique challenges and opportunities, wherein Islamic leadership, work culture, and employee engagement become pivotal to institutional progress and success.

Despite their strategic role, PTKIN face persistent challenges in achieving international recognition, including limited research output, insufficient global collaboration, and inconsistent application of value-based leadership models that often remain stagnant (Fauzi, 2021). These challenges are compounded by systemic institutional issues, such as inadequate quality management and strategic planning. Nonetheless, opportunities for improvement exist through strategic management and quality enhancement initiatives (Syukron, 2022). International rankings such as QS World University Rankings and Times Higher Education heavily weigh research impact, global partnerships, and academic reputation—areas in which PTKIN frequently lag behind. Addressing these obstacles requires understanding how leadership and work culture influence organizational outcomes, particularly through the mediating role of employee engagement.

Previous studies demonstrate a positive indirect relationship between Strategic Thinking and Competitive Advantage mediated by Transformational Leadership, with a coefficient of 0.022 and a significance level of $p = 0.073$, supporting the hypothesis at 90% confidence. Further, Dynamic Capabilities also show a significant indirect effect on Competitive Advantage through Transformational Leadership, underscoring the importance of leadership in guiding internal collaboration, product innovation, market alignment, and cultivating an open mindset (Renalwin, 2025). Another study suggests

that employee engagement arises from workplace conditions and employee attitudes, and can significantly enhance organizational capacity. Strong engagement strengthens organizational culture, aligns employees with institutional goals, and fosters a learning-oriented environment that enhances loyalty and performance (Rodriguez, 2014).

The above discussion highlights the critical role of employee engagement in organizational success, particularly in the education sector. Highly engaged employees contribute to quality teaching, research, and community engagement, which are key indicators of a strong institutional reputation at the international level. Within PTKIN, engagement fosters synergy between faculty and staff, supports institutional programs, and cultivates a harmonious work environment aligned with Islamic values while promoting professional excellence (Nadia, 2024).

This study seeks to analyze the relationships between Islamic Leadership, Islamic Work Culture, and employee engagement, as well as their influence on the international reputation of PTKIN. Islamic leadership and work culture significantly shape employee performance and satisfaction, which in turn affect organizational reputation (Hardianti, 2024). Islamic leadership characterized by adherence to Islamic ethics and values positively contributes to employee performance and satisfaction, enhancing engagement and institutional reputation (Rabbad, 2024). By examining these relationships, this study aims to provide insights for improving governance, strengthening employee commitment, and elevating the global standing of Islamic higher education institutions. The findings are expected to offer actionable recommendations for integrating Islamic values into strategic planning and developing a roadmap for PTKIN to achieve sustainable growth and international visibility.

Research on integrating Islamic principles into modern organizational practices is crucial because it provides a framework for harmonizing spiritual and ethical values with contemporary management strategies. Such integration can enhance organizational effectiveness, employee motivation, and social cohesion by embedding Islamic values such as justice, trust, and ethical leadership within management practices. This study demonstrates the potential of Islamic principles to provide comprehensive guidance for resource management and leadership, bridging the gap between traditional Islamic teachings and modern organizational demands. While existing literature often examines Islamic leadership or work culture in isolation, this study investigates their combined influence, mediated by employee engagement, in achieving institutional goals. Accordingly, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how Islamic higher education institutions can position themselves as globally competitive entities while remaining faithful to their foundational values and mission.

B. METHOD

Design

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach with a correlational design to examine the relationships among the variables. The analysis utilizes Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess both direct and indirect effects, which are subsequently explained and narrated in accordance with predetermined variable categories through the selected research indicators.

Sampling

The population of this study consists of academic and non-academic staff from five State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) across the Indonesian archipelago, namely: Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Malang, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Surabaya, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Yogyakarta, Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Bandung, and Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Semarang. A total of 555 respondents were selected using proportional stratified random sampling to ensure adequate and representative distribution across institutional strata.

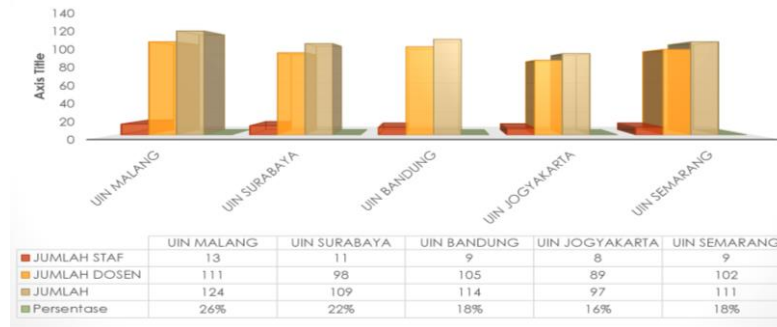


Figure 1. Sampling

Technique for collecting data

Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire developed as a research instrument encompassing three key dimensions representing the main variables of this study. Measurement of these variables was conducted using validated and reliable instruments, as illustrated in the following diagram:

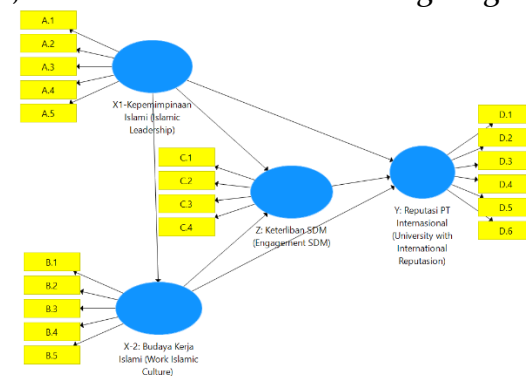


Figure 2. SEM Variable Analysis

1. **Islamic Leadership (variable):** Justice, trustworthiness, exemplary behavior, consultation (shūrā), and empathy.
2. **Islamic Work Culture (variable):** Ethical conduct, collaboration, responsibility, viewing work as an act of worship (‘ibādah), and workplace justice.
3. **Employee Engagement (variable):** Dedication, vigor, absorption, and emotional commitment.
4. **International Reputation (variable):** Research output, global collaboration, academic excellence, presence of international students and faculty, graduate employability, and cultural and social contributions.

the following is a table of variables that are interrelated in the research is:

Table 1: Variabels Indicator research

Hipotesis	variable relationship	Indicator	Decision
$X_1 \rightarrow Z$	Islamic Leadership- Employee Engagement	Justice, trustworthiness, exemplary behavior, consultation (shūrā), and empathy.	Accepted
$X_2 \rightarrow Z$	Work Culture – Employee Engagement	collaborative and ethical	Accepted
$Z \rightarrow Y$	Employee Engagement- International Reputation	Research output, global collaboration, academic excellence, presence of international students and faculty	accepted
$X_2 \rightarrow Y$	Work Culture- International Reputation	Discipline, Loyalty and responsibility	Rejected

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study consists of two main stages: (a) the assessment of validity, and (b) the evaluation of the reliability of the measurement model. Upon completion of these stages, structural model testing is conducted to examine the hypothesized relationships among the research variables. The analysis focuses on identifying the correlations and directional effects between variables as specified in the hypotheses. The mediating effect of employee engagement is tested using a bootstrapping technique to ensure a robust and concrete interpretation of statistical outputs generated through the SEM-PLS analysis.

C. RESULT

Most respondents were academic staff (91%), with the largest representation originating from UIN Malang (26%). The majority of participants rated Islamic Leadership and Islamic Work Culture as highly positive, indicating a favorable perception of institutional governance. Furthermore, 78% of respondents strongly affirmed the importance of engagement in enhancing organizational outcomes. This reflects a shared acknowledgment of the crucial role of leadership and organizational culture in fostering an environment conducive to achieving international standards.

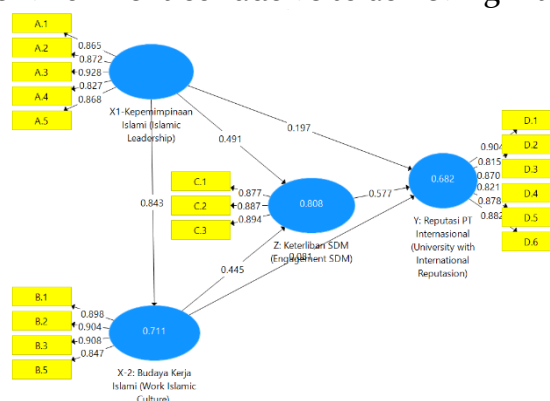


Figure 2. Result

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha's Result

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Islamic Leadership	0,818	0,877	0,898	0,834
Work Culture	0,892	0,866	0,860	0,711
Employee Engagement	0,758	0,784	0,803	0,808

In the second phase of analysis, the results of Cronbach's Alpha and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were examined. Cronbach's Alpha is used to measure the level of internal reliability and to determine the extent to which the indicators used to measure a construct are correlated with one another in forming a consistent scale. A Cronbach's Alpha value of $\alpha \geq 0.90$ indicates that the construct demonstrates excellent reliability, meaning that the variance is well explained by its indicators.

The AVE value serves as a measure of convergent validity for the construct under investigation. A higher AVE value signifies stronger convergent validity, indicating that the indicators employed effectively measure the intended construct. The interpretation of AVE is as follows: (a) $AVE \geq 0.50$ reflects good convergent validity, meaning that more than 50% of the variance is explained by the construct.

The results of the convergent validity test are as follows:

Tabel 3. Validity Convergent

Hipotesis	AVE	Porsentase	Category
Islamic Leadership	0,834	83,4%	excellent
Work Culture	0,711	71,1%	good
Employee Engagement	0,808	80,8%	xcellent

Based on the AVE results, Islamic Leadership has an AVE of **0.834**, Islamic Work Culture **0.711**, Employee Engagement **0.589**, and International Reputation **0.808**. These findings demonstrate that all variables meet the criteria for strong convergent validity. The SEM analysis further confirms that these variables exert significant influence and fall within the "good" category, as each explains more than 50% of the variance, contributing positively to the overall model.

The SEM analysis results above answer the hypotheses as follows:

Tabel 4: Hipotesis reaserch

Hipotesis	Koefisien	P-value	Decision
$X_1 \rightarrow Z$	0,258	0,006	Accepted
$X_2 \rightarrow Z$	0,300	0,002	Accepted
$Z \rightarrow Y$	0,139	0,015	accepted
$X_1 \rightarrow Y$	1,706	0,089	Rejected
$X_2 \rightarrow Y$	1,328	0,185	Rejected

From the table 4, it can be explained in detail as follows

1. **Islamic Leadership → Employee Engagement ($X_1 \rightarrow Z$): Significant** (T-statistic = 4.125, $p < 0.01$). Islamic Leadership significantly enhances employee engagement by promoting justice, trust, and exemplary behavior, thereby fostering a motivated and aligned workforce.
2. **Islamic Work Culture → Employee Engagement ($X_2 \rightarrow Z$): Significant** (T-statistic = 4.839, $p < 0.01$). A collaborative and ethical Islamic work culture effectively strengthens employee dedication and engagement.
3. **Employee Engagement → International Reputation ($Z \rightarrow Y$): Significant** (T-statistic = 3.452, $p < 0.05$). Higher levels of employee engagement lead to improved research outcomes, increased global collaboration, and enhanced academic performance—factors essential for achieving international recognition.
4. **Islamic Leadership → International Reputation ($X_1 \rightarrow Y$): Not significant** (T-statistic = 1.706, $p = 0.089$). Islamic Leadership practices do not exert a direct influence on international reputation.
5. **Islamic Work Culture → International Reputation ($X_2 \rightarrow Y$): Not significant** (T-statistic = 1.328, $p = 0.185$). Similarly, Islamic Work Culture does not directly affect institutional international reputation.

Discussion

Leadership and Islamic Engagement ($X_1 \rightarrow Z$)

The relationship between Islamic leadership and employee engagement in this study is found to be highly significant. Leaders who uphold the values of trust, compassion, justice, and integrity are able to create a supportive, ethical, and psychologically safe work environment. Such conditions foster a strong sense of trust, belonging, and loyalty among employees within the institution. These findings align with Gerry Yukl's theory of transformational leadership, which underscores the importance of inspiring and motivating followers, facilitating individual development, and building trust-based and morally grounded relationships.

Research by Kausar, Arif, and Sebgag (2025) further reinforces this conclusion, demonstrating that transformational leadership in the digital era plays a crucial role in promoting innovation, enhancing organizational adaptability, and enabling the strategic use of technology. In the context of higher education institutions, leaders who apply transformational leadership principles alongside Islamic values serve as role models in integrating technology into teaching and learning processes, fostering a positive organizational culture, and strengthening employees' intrinsic motivation.

Although this study shows that Islamic leadership does not have a direct effect on university reputation ($X_1 \rightarrow Y$), its influence on employee engagement ($X_1 \rightarrow Z$) is a critical mediating factor in cultivating a healthy, productive, and well-being-oriented work environment. Employee engagement thus becomes a strategic bridge linking ethical, value-based Islamic leadership practices to broader institutional performance outcomes, including improvements in university reputation through more professional, proactive, and committed employee behavior.

Work Culture and Islamic Engagement ($X_2 \rightarrow Z$)

Islamic Work Culture, rooted in principles such as *shiddiq* (honesty) and *ihsan* (excellence), plays a crucial role in enhancing employees' emotional and spiritual fulfillment (Shakila Kausar, 2025). This culture is characterized by a set of ethical guidelines that promote moral behavior and positive work attributes, which are essential for cultivating a satisfying and meaningful work environment. The integration of these principles into workplace practices can significantly improve job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and overall employee performance (Trab, 2024).

A work culture that prioritizes collaboration and ethical conduct fosters a deeper connection between employees and their roles, thereby strengthening engagement and dedication. Although Islamic Work Culture does not directly influence university reputation ($X_2 \rightarrow Y$), its impact on employee engagement highlights the importance of establishing a supportive and value-driven organizational climate.

Engagement and University Reputation ($Z \rightarrow Y$)

Employee engagement is a critical factor that bridges internal organizational practices with external reputation, particularly within academic settings where outputs such as research publications and international collaborations are highly valued. Engaged employees are more likely to contribute positively to these outputs, thereby enhancing the university's overall reputation.

The relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance is multifaceted, encompassing dimensions such as communication, career development, and recognition. When managed effectively, these elements can lead to increased productivity and innovation—both of which are essential for strengthening institutional reputation. Thus, employee engagement serves as a central component in shaping a university's external reputation. Through its substantial contribution to institutional performance, employee engagement enables universities to reinforce and advance their international standing.

Leadership and Islamic Reputation ($X_1 \rightarrow Y$)

Although Islamic leadership does not directly influence a university's reputation, it has a significant impact on employee engagement, which in turn can enhance institutional reputation. Islamic leadership cultivates a work environment grounded in spiritual and ethical values, which can lead to heightened employee motivation and performance. This leadership style indirectly contributes to the university's reputation by strengthening employee engagement, a critical determinant of organizational success.

Higher education leaders must actively promote a culture of innovation, openness to change, and continuous professional development among academic staff, particularly in the use of collaborative technologies. Effective communication and faculty empowerment are also essential components that contribute to institutional advancement. Ethical leaders foster a motivated workforce aligned with institutional goals, thereby optimizing positive outcomes necessary for strengthening the university's reputation. Moreover, the leader's role in creating a supportive and comfortable work environment is instrumental in achieving institutional success and attaining the desired reputation outcomes.

Work Culture and Islamic Reputation (X₂ → Y)

Islamic work culture can significantly influence a university's reputation by fostering a high-performance environment. This is achieved through the integration of Islamic values and ethics, which promote a cohesive and morally upright workplace. Such an environment not only enhances employee performance but also contributes to the institution's overall image and attractiveness to prospective students and the broader community (Sliwka, 2023).

The incorporation of Islamic principles such as *ukhuwwah* (brotherhood), *'adl* (justice), and *ihsan* (excellence) into workplace practices can create a supportive and ethical atmosphere conducive to high performance and positive reputation-building. Employees in value-driven organizations are more likely to demonstrate creativity and dedication, thereby contributing to institutional success. By embedding Islamic cultural values into strategic operations, universities can strengthen their global position within an increasingly competitive higher education landscape.

Strategic Implication

The integration of Islamic leadership, work culture, and engagement strategies is essential for enhancing the reputation of educational institutions. Universities should prioritize leadership training that emphasizes ethical governance and implement initiatives that cultivate a values-based workplace culture. These include professional development programs, recognition schemes, and opportunities for employee involvement in decision-making processes. Aligning employee efforts with institutional goals through these strategies not only strengthens internal dynamics but also drives sustainable international competitiveness. Institutional planning that is carefully and comprehensively prepared is able to bridge the improvement of institutional quality to achieve an international reputation. This can be done through various policies by holding various trainings and preparing institutional strategic plans in an integral manner.

The strategic implications of integrating Islamic leadership, work culture, and employee engagement in achieving university reputation can be illustrated schematically as follows:

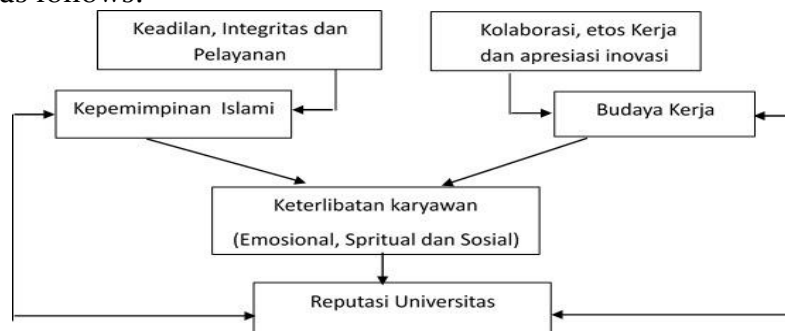


Figure 4. Variable integration

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of Islamic Leadership, Islamic Work Culture, and Employee Engagement in shaping the international reputation of universities. The main findings of this research are as follows:

1. Islamic Leadership contributes positively to university reputation, although its direct effect is not statistically significant. Values such as justice, integrity, and service play an essential role in enhancing employee engagement, which ultimately strengthens institutional reputation.
2. Islamic Work Culture demonstrates a positive association with university reputation, even though its direct impact is not statistically significant. Islamic values—including collaboration, work ethics, and appreciation for innovation—foster a supportive work environment that enhances performance and institutional standing.
3. Employee Engagement serves as a crucial mediator linking Islamic Leadership and Islamic Work Culture to university reputation. High levels of emotional, spiritual, and social engagement significantly improve university performance and global recognition.

This study emphasizes that value-based approaches rooted in Islamic principles—particularly within leadership and organizational culture—can serve as effective strategies for achieving international recognition, especially in Islamic higher education institutions. Moreover, employee engagement emerges as a pivotal factor connecting Islamic Leadership and Work Culture to institutional reputation. These findings provide theoretical contributions to the literature on strategic management in Islamic education and offer practical guidance for Islamic universities seeking to compete in a global academic landscape.

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