

Acehnese Cultural Context in Islamic State Higher Education Institutions' Management of International Internships (Malaysia & Thailand)

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ABSTRACT

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Received: 11 April 2025

Revised: 03 June 2025

Accepted: 25 June 2025

Published: 30 June 2025

The purpose of this study is to analyze and describe the planning, actuating and evaluating faced by students in participating in international internship program activities at Islamic universities in Aceh. This research is a qualitative study. The subjects of this study include students, the Dean of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, supervising lecturers, as well as principals and teachers at schools in Malaysia and Thailand. The research was conducted at three state campuses in Aceh, namely Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, State Islamic Institute of Lhokseumawe, and Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College, which have carried out international internship activities in the last two years. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and document studies. Data analysis involved data reduction, data display, verification, and conclusion. The results of the study concluded that state Islamic universities in Aceh have conducted international teaching internship program in Malaysia and Thailand, each with its private regulations regarding implementation. The stages of these international teaching internship generally consist of planning, implementation, and post-implementation. Higher education management has a strategic role in improving the competence of prospective teachers through international internship programs that are well managed, collaborative and without eliminating local values and Acehnese culture. The pedagogical, professional, social competence and understanding of intercultural differences of prospective teachers can be improved if the international internship program is managed with an integrated approach, starting from planning, implementation, and evaluation involving various stakeholders.



Keywords: *Acehnese Culture; International Internships; Islamic State Higher Education Institutions; Local Culture; Prospective Teachers' Competence.*

 : <https://doi.org/10.47766/idarrah.v9i1.6004>

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INTRODUCTION

Many universities around the world have made international internship programs an integral part of their curriculum (George Mwangi & Yao, 2020; De Wit & Altbach, 2021; Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024). These programs are designed to provide hands-on work experience in a global environment, enabling students to develop professional skills (Tretyakova et al., 2021), expand international networks (Tapiolas et al., 2024), and understand the dynamics of diverse cultures (Lambert Snodgrass et al., 2023). International internship programs also help universities produce graduates who are better prepared to compete in the global job market (Cheng et al., 2023).

The experience of being in a different cultural environment also enriches international interns' understanding of global diversity (Chambers & Lavery, 2022). Interactions with people from various cultural backgrounds can develop knowledge of different customs, values, and norms, which is highly beneficial in an increasingly interconnected global workforce (Jin et al., 2020). Understanding and appreciating cultural differences encountered during internships can be applied in various work contexts (Boyd et al., 2019). This knowledge enhances communication skills and the ability to work in multicultural teams, which are becoming more dominant in this global era (Cinelli & Jones, 2017).

The international teaching internship program also helps participants expand their global networks. Networking is a valuable career asset, and international connections can create many new job opportunities (Jackson, 2018). Interacting with professionals from different countries provides valuable insights and perspectives (Czop Assaf et al., 2019). Tsuda et al., (2022) stated that international internships offer several benefits, including increased awareness of cultural differences, improved communication skills, positive experiences, becoming effective facilitators, and better job prospects for the future.

The implementation of international internships often faces various challenges (Kearney et al., 2018; Ma & Zhao, 2018). On one hand, these programs offer significant opportunities to enhance technical and non-technical skills, foreign language proficiency, and cultural adaptation abilities (Tualaulelei, 2021). On the other hand, students often face obstacles such as high costs, differences in regulations between countries, adaptation to different work cultures (Wrench et al., 2022; Muadin et al., 2022), and a lack of support from educational institutions (OTA, 2018). These challenges can impact the quality of the internship experience and the learning outcomes achieved (Jackson, 2017).

Research on international internships has been conducted at Islamic universities in Aceh. Research conducted by Auni et al., (2022) concluded that the benefits of international internship programs include improving the professional competence of prospective teachers, including teaching skills, global insight into education, career planning, communication skills, and opening up new opportunities. Zulkarnain &

Mujahidin (2023) found that the competencies targeted in internship programs generally focus on cognitive and psychomotor aspects, while the development of competencies in the affective domain still receives less attention or has not been optimally explored. Research by Maesaro & Wijirahayu (2025) comparing internship experiences of students in two different cultural contexts, namely Indonesia and Thailand, showed an increase in self-confidence in teaching abilities. These results confirm that practical internship experiences play an important role in improving teaching readiness and cross-cultural competence, which in turn helps prospective educators to adapt and thrive in diverse educational environments.

The research gap related to international internship programs is important to be addressed immediately because there are still limited studies exploring how these programs are implemented in local contexts, especially in Islamic higher education institutions. In fact, in recent years, these institutions have shown significant innovation in designing and implementing international internship programs that not only emphasize aspects of teaching professionalism, but also integrate Islamic values and local wisdom. This innovation reflects a strategic effort to address the challenges of globalization of education while maintaining institutional identity. Therefore, research that explores the managerial practices and success of this program is important as a contribution to the development of a more inclusive, contextual, and relevant international internship model for Islamic higher education institutions in Aceh, Indonesia.

Although international internship programs are in increasing demand, research on their impact on student competency development (Di Pietro, 2022; Tohari, 2025) particularly in developing countries like Indonesia, remains relatively limited (Mursitama et al., 2022; Fakhruddin et al., 2023). Therefore, further research is needed to understand how these programs can be optimized to provide maximum positive impacts for students, educational institutions, and the global workforce.

This research addresses a significant gap in the literature by focusing on an integrated international teaching internship program within Islamic universities in Aceh, specifically exploring student motivation for placements in Malay-speaking Malaysia and incorporating international community service lectures—an unprecedented combination in previous studies. The primary objective of this article is to analyze and describe how State Islamic Universities manage international partnerships to enhance the competence of prospective teachers. A key novelty of this study lies in its holistic approach, integratively analyzing individual student experiences alongside the roles of educational institutions and overseas partner schools across the entire internship lifecycle, encompassing preparation, implementation, and follow-up processes, rather than merely evaluating final outcomes.

Previous studies generally highlight the benefits of international internships from the perspective of improving individual competencies, such as cultural adaptability and employability skills. This study offers a different approach by examining how interactions between various stakeholders (students, educational institutions, companies, and international support organizations) affect the quality of internship experiences. Therefore, this study provides a multidimensional perspective that focuses not only on students as the main subjects but also on the ecosystem that supports the success of internship programs.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and views on international internship programs. This study employed an exploratory case study design. Case studies were selected because they provide a detailed understanding of participants' unique experiences with international internship programs. The focus of the study is on the experiences of students from Islamic universities in Aceh specifically Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe, and Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College who have participated in internships abroad over the past two years.

The subjects of this study included 22 students who had completed an international internship program, 3 supervisors or internship coordinator from educational institutions, 3 representatives of the organizations where students completed their internships, and 3 leaders of the Institute of Community Research and Development. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they had relevant experience related to the research topic. The researcher is the main instrument in this study. The researcher is directly involved in the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The researcher's sensitivity to the context, meaning, and phenomena that occur at the research location is the key to obtaining in-depth data. This study uses supporting instruments in the form of semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and documentation study formats. The combination of these instruments allows researchers to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth picture of the phenomena being studied.

Data collection was conducted through: (1) In-depth interviews to obtain narratives of experiences from students, supervising lecturers, and partner schools regarding the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of internship programs and the impact on the development of prospective teacher competencies; (2) Participatory observation, namely analyzing conducted during the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of the international internship program to directly observe interactions, learning activities, and student adaptation in a cross-cultural context; (3) Document studies, namely analyzing official documents such as

internship guidelines, training materials to understand the international internship process and policies, evaluation reports, and university policies related to international internship programs to support findings from interviews and observations and strengthen the validity of research data.

Data analysis followed [Sugiyono's \(2019\)](#) framework, which includes data reduction, display, verification, and conclusion. Data reduction streamlined raw data by focusing on university management strategies for developing teacher competencies. Data was presented using thematic matrices and descriptive narratives to identify management patterns. Continuous verification through source and technique triangulation ensured data validity and reliability, comparing information across interviews, documents, and observations. The conclusions highlighted that structured, globally-oriented university management significantly enhances prospective teachers' pedagogical, professional, and intercultural competence through international internship programs.

This research aims to contribute new insights to higher education policies and international internship programs, offering a more inclusive, effective, and globally relevant approach. Theoretically, the findings enrich the literature on international teaching internships, particularly in the context of globalization and cross-cultural education. Practically, the study provides a strategic foundation for developing policies and practices that strengthen universities' contributions at both local and global levels.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The international teaching internship program at Islamic universities in Aceh is structured in three interconnected phases: planning (pre-implementation), actuating (implementation), and evaluation (post-implementation), each encompassing various activities to ensure effective execution. This comprehensive approach is crucial as pre-service teacher readiness is paramount for effective teaching ([Nufus et al., 2023](#)), and despite potential obstacles, these teachers are equipped with strategies for interactive learning ([Ardiyansah, 2021](#)). Furthermore, international education is highly valued in the professional sphere, particularly for developing foreign language proficiency and strong decision-making skills, with research indicating that companies employing more foreign graduates increasingly recognize the significance of international experience.

A teaching practicum is a structured opportunity that allows pre-service teachers to apply the knowledge and skills they've acquired during their education by engaging directly in classroom teaching, all under the guidance of experienced school mentors ([Zaki & Salsabila, 2024](#)). [Masadeh \(2017\)](#) describes it as a university course

that offers practical exposure to real teaching situations, helping prospective teachers become more familiar with everyday instructional practices and the obstacles they may encounter. Practicum experiences give student-teachers the chance to test their teaching strategies and gain meaningful insights through observation and feedback from seasoned educators. In this context, the term “practicum” refers specifically to teaching internships, even though the word is sometimes associated with unpaid work placements, whereas “internship” is often linked to paid roles (Simons et al., 2012).

There are multiple motivations behind the development of international teaching practicum initiatives, with globalization and the need for global competitiveness being among the most prominent. The teaching profession today is facing numerous global challenges, including shifts in the economy, increasing competition in the job market, rapid technological change, and evolving student demographics (Mesker et al., 2018). Teacher training colleges need to engage their students in international and global experiences so that future teachers will be more sensitive and understanding of the diverse students who will be found in many classrooms in the future (Knutson Miller & Gonzalez, 2016).

Prior to program implementation, the campus undertakes extensive preparations, including establishing regulations, technical guidelines, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with partner schools abroad, alongside scheduling and logistical arrangements. This initial phase encompasses student recruitment, selection, registration, document completion, passport processing, comprehensive briefing sessions, assignment of field supervisor lecturers, and ultimately, student escort to the destination country.

Concurrently, leaders at both university and governmental levels, acting as policymakers, are crucial in improving coordination and securing concrete funding for these international internship programs. Enhanced coordination is achieved through the formation of a dedicated committee that structurally links various stakeholders—faculties, international cooperation bureaus, foreign partners, and students—tasked with developing technical guidelines, facilitating cross-institutional communication, and monitoring program implementation. Financial support, in the form of university budget allocations and grant funds from overseas partners, is strategically provided to subsidize international internship students, thereby ensuring program accessibility and financial sustainability by removing economic barriers to participation.

The results of observations and interviews with students Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College, who participated in the international teaching internship program, revealed that the internship activities lasted one month and took place at four schools in Thailand. The recruitment process was conducted by the Tarbiyah and Teaching Department of Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic

College, with 11 students successfully passing the selection. Before participating in the program, students received various forms of preparation, including briefings on activity preparation, teaching models and approaches, regulations and the education system in Thailand, cultural introductions from partner schools, and other relevant information.

Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe and Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College have policies and regulations on the implementation of international teaching internship program. The policies and regulations for the implementation of international teaching internship is recorded in the international teaching internship program guidebook. The guidebook was compiled together involving related leadership elements. The head of the international teaching internship program of Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College also stated that:

"Our basis for implementing international teaching internship program is the policy issued by the chairman of Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College in 2023. Then the policy is detailed in the technical guidelines for implementing international teaching internship program compiled by Deputy Chairperson I, Chairperson of P2M and Chairperson of the Tarbiyah and Teaching Department as well as several lecturers appointed as the committee for implementing international teaching internship program."

All regulations regarding the implementation of the international teaching internship program are detailed in the program's guidebook. The results of the document study show that the guidebook includes the legal basis, a general description of the program, implementation procedures, objectives and benefits, mechanisms for implementation, program activities, accountability reports, assessments, and attachments. The attachments to the guidebook include formats for activity implementation observation, daily activity sheets, reporting, assessment, and certificates.

The international teaching internship program is carried out as a follow-up to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) established between Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe, and Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College, in collaboration with partner schools in Malaysia and Thailand. As the Secretary of the Institute for Research and Community Service at Ar-Raniry State Islamic University stated:

"The international teaching internship and community service activities are the implementation of the MoU that has been agreed upon. The signing of the MoA takes place when the international teaching internship and community service program is

being implemented, and when the program implementation group is in the destination country."

Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College formalized MoUs with partner institutions in Thailand and Malaysia in 2023. Program implementation commenced with Thailand in 2023, followed by Malaysia in 2024. Subsequently, in 2024, Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College conducted an integrated international teaching internship and community service program in both Thailand and Malaysia. The Head of Meulaboh State Islamic College articulated that:

"Thailand is only willing to sign the MoA with our campus because there are many stages and processes that partner schools in Thailand must go through to obtain prior approval from the Thai government. Therefore, they offered to sign the MoA directly when delivering the students."

The schedule and duration of the implementation of the international teaching internship and community service program are determined based on the agreement between the university and the partner institution in the destination country. According to the results of the interview with the international teaching internship and community service program committee of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Ar-Raniry State Islamic University:

"... Before we send students to carry out the international teaching internship and community service program, we have reached an agreement with the partner institutions in the destination country regarding the technical aspects of the program, including the location, duration, and other matters deemed necessary for both parties to discuss. We will then communicate this information to the students, who will be the participants in the international teaching internship and community service program."

Meulaboh State Islamic College sets the schedule for implementing activities based on agreements with schools in Thailand and Malaysia. The implementation timeline and technical details will then be communicated to the students who will participate. Before departure, Meulaboh State Islamic College students also hold virtual meetings with partner institutions in the destination country to explain and discuss various aspects related to the implementation of the international teaching internship and community service activities.

Students who have been declared eligible are expected to prepare the necessary documents for re-registration. The results of the document study show that the required documents for students to participate in the international teaching internship program include: 1) Active college letter, 2) Grade Report/Academic Transcript (KHS/Kartu Hasil Studi), 3) Study Plan Card (KRS/Kartu Rencana Studi), 4) Statement of integrity maintenance, 5) Statement of compliance with regulations during the

international teaching internship program, 6) Photocopy of passport, 7) Statement of permission and funding source from parents for the international teaching internship and program, 8) Health certificate.

The briefing conducted by each university varies in terms of the duration, materials, and techniques used. The briefing conducted by Ar-Raniry State Islamic University and State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe lasts for one day and covers materials such as explanations of the location, culture, programs, and regulations for implementing international teaching internship program activities.

One effective form of applied learning is participating in teaching internships. Research has shown that such internships not only support personal and professional growth but also foster greater social and cultural understanding. The findings of our study align with this body of research. Importantly, international teaching experiences offer pre-service teachers the chance to take part in active learning processes—an approach that significantly contributes to both their personal development and professional readiness (Simons et al., 2012).

The briefing materials included strengthening Acehese dance, teaching practice, engaging learning models, ice-breaking activities, introduction to the culture and regulations at the placement location, language strengthening, speech and sermon practice, and guidance on how to write activity reports. According to interviews with Meulaboh State Islamic College students, they stated that:

“I attended the briefing for about one month. I received various information through this activity, such as the application of ice-breaking in learning, the use of active, innovative, creative, and fun teaching methods, information related to culture and regulations during the international teaching internship and community service program, personal preparation, how to write daily and activity reports, community service programs, an introduction to the basics of the Thai language, dance lessons, and other materials.”

Meulaboh State Islamic College conducts online and face-to-face briefings that are adjusted to the material, situation, and conditions. The introduction to culture, regulations, and the education system in the destination country is delivered directly by teachers or foreign partner schools online. Other materials are provided by supervising lecturers for the international teaching internship and community service program. The briefing is conducted no later than one week before departure. The departure is attended by relevant leaders and all students.

The international teaching internship and community service program officially begins with a transfer ceremony, during which the participants are formally entrusted by the university to the partner madrasahs and local communities in the host country. Overseas partner schools place students based on the number of participants and the

capacity of each school. Typically, the number of student placements ranges from two to four students per school.

International teaching internships play an essential role in fostering discussions around educational values and exploring how these values shape teaching approaches, ultimately supporting the professional growth of student-teachers (Juul-Wiese, 2023). It is important that pre-service teachers are encouraged to participate in such programs, and that teacher education institutions remain open to facilitating them, as these experiences promote educational diversity. Naturally, international internships involve the exchange and movement of teaching concepts, which may lead to moments of tension or disagreement. Rather than being seen as obstacles, these differences should be embraced as part of the learning process in preparing future educators. According to Aydarova & Marquardt (2016), encouraging students to reflect on their preconceived notions about foreign education systems prior to engaging in international teaching placements can help ease potential cultural or professional disconnection.

The international teaching internship program centers on the core values that shape instructional methods and emphasizes the importance of critically examining these principles within the context of international teaching placements, where diverse educational philosophies inevitably converge. This program provides an opportunity to challenge deeply held assumptions and perceptions, enabling participants to embrace and appreciate alternative educational and pedagogical viewpoints, thus broadening their "pedagogical world." To achieve this, student-teachers need adequate preparation and support before, during, and after the internship (Klein & Wikan, 2019; Skrefsrud, 2022).

In 2023, the universities that will implement the international community service program are Ar-Raniry State Islamic University and State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe. On the other hand, Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College will carry out the international teaching internship and community service program in an integrated format. Ar-Raniry State Islamic University and State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe will organize the international community service program over two weeks, while Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College will extend the program to one month. The activities will take place in Thailand, specifically in the regions of Songkla, Sadao, Pattani, and Thung Nui in Southern Thailand.

Students carry out community service in accordance with the programs provided by each university during the briefing. The Principal of SMA MATSA Penang-Malaysia stated that;

"We have provided students who will participate in teaching internship and community service program activities about a month ago before they participated in this activity. With this provision, teaching internship and community service program students

already understand the schedule of activities and culture at MATSA school. Students teach according to their respective fields and also participate in activities outside the school schedule. For example; cleaning the mosque environment, prospering the mosque, teaching Acehese culture and other social activities."

The teaching internship program have been adjusted to the needs, conditions, and suitability of the local population through discussions between the universities and community representatives. The integrated teaching internship and community service activities are carried out by Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College, which includes teaching practices at schools and community service outside of school hours, such as conducting seminars, organizing environmental clean-up activities, and teaching Acehese culture, including dance, traditional Acehese cuisine, and more.

Overseas internship programs provide student-teachers with the opportunity to enhance their coaching in diverse settings. This concept is often referred to as "education without borders." Education without borders represents a shift beyond traditional educational limits, both geographically and conceptually. It is based on the idea that international collaborations are crucial for improving the quality of education. As a result, many educational institutions and governments are motivated to develop international practicum initiatives, recognizing the significant benefits they offer. In a study by Lee (2021), which examined Hong Kong student-teachers participating in a six-week international teaching internship in New Zealand, it was found that the experience greatly enhanced participants' cultural awareness, teaching knowledge and skills, language proficiency, and classroom communication abilities.

The expenses for carrying out the program are divided between the university and the students. Students are expected to cover part of their living and transportation costs while in Thailand, while the university takes care of a portion of the transportation expenses. The activities carried out by the participants in this study during the international teaching internship program included report writing. Each student involved in the program is required to submit reports, adhering to the format specified by their respective universities. These activity reports must be submitted daily and signed by the field supervisor at the host institution.

The headmaster of Tessaban 2 Bansadao School stated, "We welcome teaching internship and community service program students from Meulaboh State Islamic College to practice teaching and carry out community service in and around our school. We will organize student activities outside the classroom, such as English camp. The principal of Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School in Thailand also stated, 'We will ask teaching internship students to teach English and Islamic Religion classes according to the supervising teacher's schedule. Additionally, we will ask teaching

internship and community service program students to assist with activities outside the school, such as teaching Quran reading and teaching Acehese dance to our students." The international internship activity report contains every activity carried out while at the location. Internship students make activity reports in several chapters according to the guidelines set by their respective universities.

This global teaching internship program is intended to equip pre-service teachers with engaging and impactful teaching strategies that inspire students and make learning more enjoyable. These teaching methods should be tailored to suit the developmental needs of various age groups, as the educational demands for primary and secondary school educators differ. Aspiring elementary school teachers are required to have at least a senior high school diploma with the necessary qualifications, whereas those aiming to teach in secondary schools must possess a postgraduate degree in a specific subject area with a required minimum grade. This international teaching internship is a month-long program that provides students with the chance to gain international exposure. A key objective of the program is to introduce students to different cultural perspectives and beliefs. For students enrolled in international teacher education programs, internships typically take the form of teaching practicums (Robinson et al., 2017).

One of the main challenges in implementing international internship programs is the high cost, which includes travel tickets, visas, accommodation, insurance, and living expenses while abroad. This challenge becomes more complex when involving students from lower-middle economic backgrounds, potentially creating a gap in access to international experiences. The high cost can also burden higher education institutions, especially if there is no specific budget allocation for this program. In the context of educational management, this challenge shows the importance of strategic and sustainable financial planning, including exploring alternative funding sources such as partnerships with donor agencies, scholarship programs, or collaboration with international partners (Dadu et al., 2024). In addition, it is necessary to develop affirmative policies that support equal access, so that the benefits of international internship programs are not only enjoyed by certain groups. Therefore, cost management is not only a matter of administrative techniques, but also reflects the institution's commitment to the principles of justice and equity (Ayam, 2024).

The challenge of cultural adaptation is also one of the crucial aspects faced by students in international internship programs. Students must adjust to the social environment, education system, communication style, and cultural values that are different from their home culture (Gong et al., 2021). This process often causes culture shock, stress, or anxiety, which can affect the academic and professional performance of interns (Mulyadi et al., 2024). Within the framework of cross-cultural psychology, especially the theory of cross-cultural adaptation by Young Yun Kim, cultural

adaptation is seen as a dynamic process involving learning, openness, and gradual adjustment (Kim & Kim, 2022).

From the perspective of educational management, this challenge indicates the need for systematic institutional support, such as pre-departure training, international mentoring, and counseling or guidance services during the internship. With the right mentoring strategy, the cultural adaptation process can be a means of forming a resilient and flexible global character, while strengthening the intercultural competence of prospective teachers. Therefore, the success of an international internship program depends greatly on the extent to which the institution understands and facilitates this adaptation process comprehensively.

International internships provide a variety of strategic benefits for prospective teachers, both academically, professionally, and personally. Academically, participants gain first-hand experience in a foreign education system that can broaden pedagogical insights and enrich innovative learning approaches (Wolinsky-Nahmias & Auerbach, 2022). Professionally, international internships train cross-cultural communication skills, adaptability, and confidence in dealing with multicultural classroom dynamics (Thin, 2025). Professional competencies are highly needed in the global era (Ridei, 2021). International interns also have the opportunity to build international networks which are useful for future career development (Di Pietro, 2022). Personally, international internships encourage independence, emotional maturity, and tolerance for cultural diversity (Lambert Snodgrass et al., 2021).

Kabilan's (2013) study highlighted several advantages experienced by trainees. Kabilan examined whether six student-teachers from the School of Educational Studies at Universiti Sains Malaysia, who enrolled in a educational practicum in the Maldives, were able to enhance their competencies. International internships provide students with opportunities to develop key skills such as communication skills, teaching confidence, interpersonal abilities, broader perspectives on education, and the ability to adapt to new work cultures (Kabilan, 2013). These programs are crucial in training future educators to adopt international perspectives (Knight & De Wit, 2018), possess international experience, are proficient in world languages, and can embed global insights into their teaching practices (Pence & Macgillivray, 2018).

Through the internship, pre-service teachers also enhanced their self-confidence and cultural awareness. Living abroad, separated from their family, friends, and familiar support systems, fostered personal growth (Egeland, 2016). This experience helped student-teachers become more self-reliant, develop practical skills, and make independent decisions, learning to live on their own, cook, and manage their finances (Shiveley & Misco, 2015).

Through targeted teaching practices, interns are expected to reap a variety of benefits, including gaining both propositional pedagogical knowledge and

pedagogical content knowledge, such as assessment methods, evaluation techniques, and alternative teaching strategies. Drawing from their experiences regarding the ideology, policies, and practices at the school, international interns are required to submit reports on their work and reflect on the challenges they face in their new roles, including interpersonal issues with teachers, mentor instructors, and school administration. As a result, interns are expected to gradually transition into full-time professional responsibilities (Chennat, 2019).

International internships help develop three key competencies in pre-service teachers: personal, professional, and social skills. According to Mesker et al., (2018), these internships enable participants to enhance their cultural awareness and strengthen their professional competence. International interns become more self-sufficient in managing their daily needs, such as food, due to being removed from their familiar social environments. In adapting to the cultural context of their host country, they must learn to fulfill their own needs. This self-reliance is one of the primary objectives of international internships—providing students, pre-service teachers, and even in-service teachers with valuable global exposure. Previous research focused more on the role of government in international higher education programs. (Li, 2016), interpretive analysis of the internationalization of higher education systems (Prasetyo et al., 2023), policy on internationalization of higher education (Crăciun, 2018), and the impact of internationalization of higher education.

Islamic Universities must comprehend the challenges faced by all stakeholders—universities, students, and partner schools—to design effective international internship programs, encompassing pre-departure training, psychological support, and inclusive financing, as these initiatives are critical for campus internationalization and enhancing graduate quality by fostering globally competent educators rooted in local values. This study uniquely contributes by analyzing the specific local context of Aceh, exploring factors such as financial constraints, foreign language readiness, institutional support, and cultural diversity, and proposes a holistic management approach—covering planning, actuating, and evaluating—that is adapted to the needs of overseas partner institutions, thereby offering a novel perspective distinct from previous research which often overlooked these contextual and comprehensive stakeholder considerations.

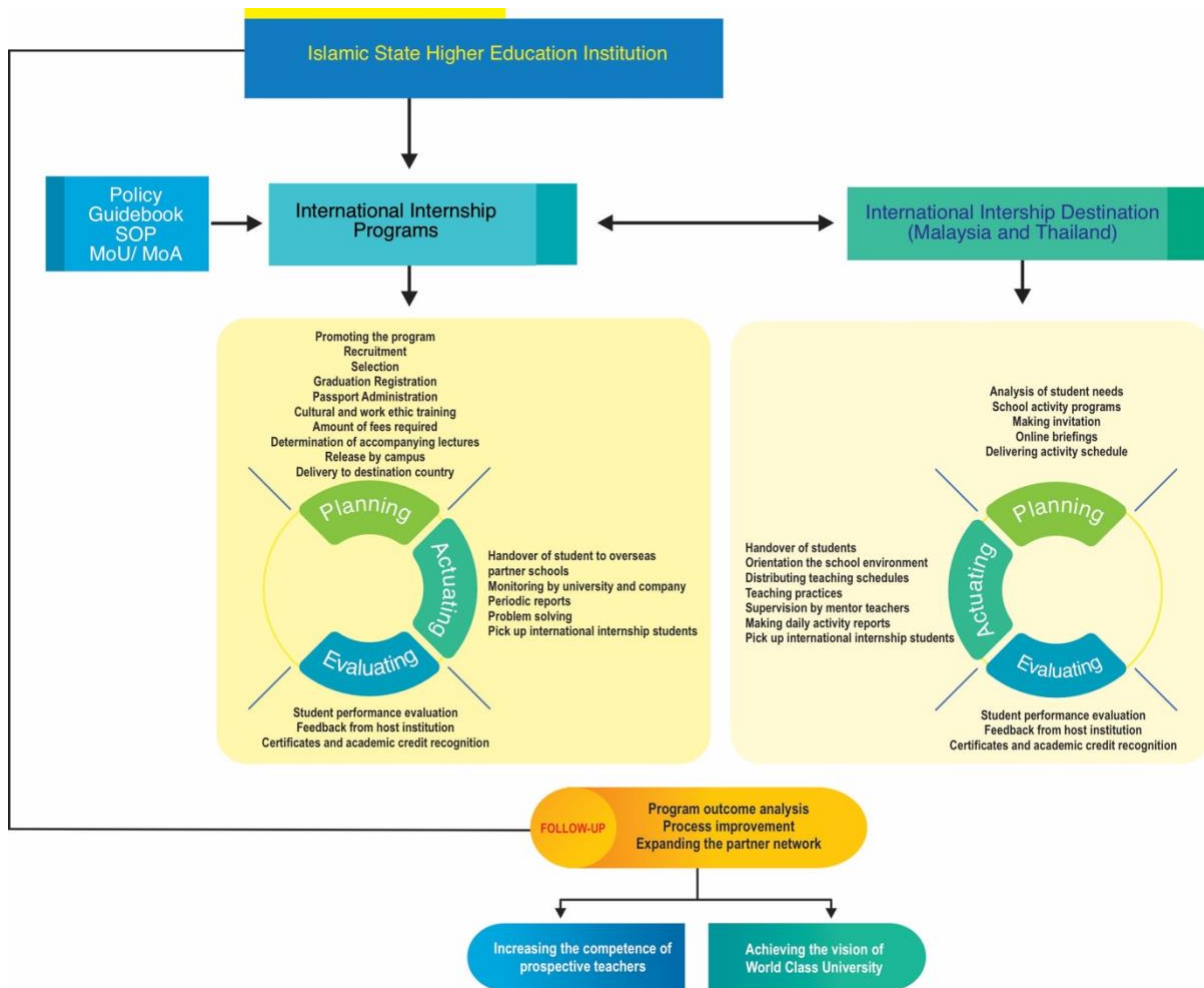


Figure 1: The Implementation of international teaching internship program

Figure 1 shows the implementation of international teaching internship program by Ar-Raniry State Islamic University, State Islamic Institute Lhokseumawe and Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh State Islamic College includes planning, actuating and evaluating (post-implementation) stages. Islamic Universities in Aceh have begun to implement international activities in the form of teaching internship program in neighboring countries such as Malaysia and Thailand. This shows that Islamic Universities in Aceh have begun to carry out their mission to compete in the international world. The international internship program management framework provides a comprehensive and systematic approach to organizing and executing internship programs across global education institutions. This framework ensures that each stage of the program is carefully managed to enhance learning outcomes, foster cross-cultural competencies, and maintain strong institutional collaborations.

The process begins with identifying the specific competency needs of students and aligning them with potential opportunities abroad. This stage involves selecting suitable international partners and formalizing the collaboration through Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) or other partnership agreements. Strategic

planning at this stage is crucial to ensure the relevance and sustainability of the program. Once the foundation is set, the next phase involves promoting the program to students and initiating a structured recruitment and selection process. This includes evaluating candidates based on application documents, language proficiency, and interviews. Successful applicants are then matched with internship positions that align with their academic background and career interests. Prior to departure, selected interns undergo a series of preparatory sessions. These include training on intercultural communication, workplace ethics, and adaptation strategies. Additionally, logistical arrangements such as visa processing, accommodation planning, and basic skills workshops are provided to ensure interns are fully equipped for the experience.

During the internship, students engage directly with their host organizations. The university and partner companies provide ongoing monitoring and support, ensuring that students are progressing well and addressing any issues that arise. Regular reports and check-ins are integral to maintaining program quality. At the conclusion of the internship, both student performance and host company feedback are collected and analyzed. This stage also includes the issuance of certificates and, where applicable, academic credit recognition. The insights gained are vital for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. Finally, a review of the program outcomes is conducted to identify areas for improvement. Feedback from all stakeholders is used to refine processes, update training content, and expand partnerships. This ensures the program remains dynamic, relevant, and impactful.

CONCLUSION

Effective university management, characterized by robust planning, implementation, and evaluation, significantly enhances prospective teachers' competence through international internship programs, fostering a strong synergy among institutional leaders, supervising lecturers, students, international partners, and local governments. This study underscores the critical role of local wisdom, demonstrating that internationalization can harmoniously integrate local identities and values, such as Islamic principles and Acehese culture, to produce globally adaptive yet culturally rooted educators. Islamic universities in Aceh uniquely implement these programs through regulated three-stage processes, consistently addressing challenges to maximize benefits for both institutions and students. The success of these initiatives ultimately hinges on student proactivity and the collective involvement of all stakeholders, offering valuable theoretical contributions and practical recommendations for developing contextual and sustainable higher education programs.

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