

## Harmony of International Education: Transformation of Innovative Community Service Program in Thailand with Al-Hidayah Foundation

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### Abstract

*This research was motivated by collaboration between the UMSU Islamic Faculty and the Al-Hidayah Foundation in implementing the Community Service Program (KKN) in Thailand. The aim is to reveal the contribution of the Al-Hidayah Foundation in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Faculty graduates through the KKN program. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with data instruments in the form of observation, interviews and documentation. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model and tested via triangulation. The research results show the significant contribution of the Al-Hidayah Foundation in improving the quality of education and empowering students. Through KKN, students experience an increase in the quality of learning, application of theory in practice, and development of leadership skills and social responsibility. This collaboration also strengthens international relations between the Al-Hidayah Foundation and UMSU, opening up opportunities for cultural exchange and educational project collaboration. It is hoped that this collaboration will provide benefits to other faculties at UMSU,*

*broaden horizons, improve the quality of education, and empower students to improve the quality of graduates.*

**Keywords:** *Collaboration of Higher Education; Improving the Quality of Education; International Relations*

## **A. Introduction**

Higher education is one of the important pillars in developing a quality and competitive society. Universities play a central role in forming qualified and potential future leaders. The Directorate General of Indonesian Higher Education has obliged every university to carry out education, research and community service as the tridharma of higher education (RI Law, 2003). Among community service that involves students in real experience in the field, the Community Service Program (KKN) has become a very important instrument in preparing students to face challenges in the real world.

In an increasingly connected global environment, collaboration between educational institutions and foundations in various countries has become a means of broadening students' horizons and providing a more diverse learning experience. Talking about foundations, in Thailand there is a foundation whose focus is in the field of education and human resource development. The foundation is called the Al-Hidayah Foundation, in full the Al-Hidayah Waqaf Foundation for Education and Social Development, which is chaired by Adul Meatam and is located in Hat Yai, Thailand. One of the programs is to become a bridge for universities that want to provide the widest possible insight and provide international learning experiences and dedication for students to practice their knowledge in the Community Service Program (KKN). In this case, the Faculty of Islamic Religion took part in taking this opportunity and collaborating with the Al-Hidayah Foundation.

This research aims to dig deeper into the contribution made by the Al-Hidayah Foundation in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Faculty graduates through the Community Service Program (KKN) conducted in Thailand. The importance of this research lies in understanding the extent of the role and contribution of the Al-Hidayah Foundation in helping the escalation of better learning quality for students in the context of the KKN program in Thailand. It is hoped that the results of this research will provide a more comprehensive view of how collaboration between the Faculty of Islamic Religion and the Al-Hidayah Foundation can shape students' educational experiences, improve the quality of graduates, and better prepare them to face real-world challenges.

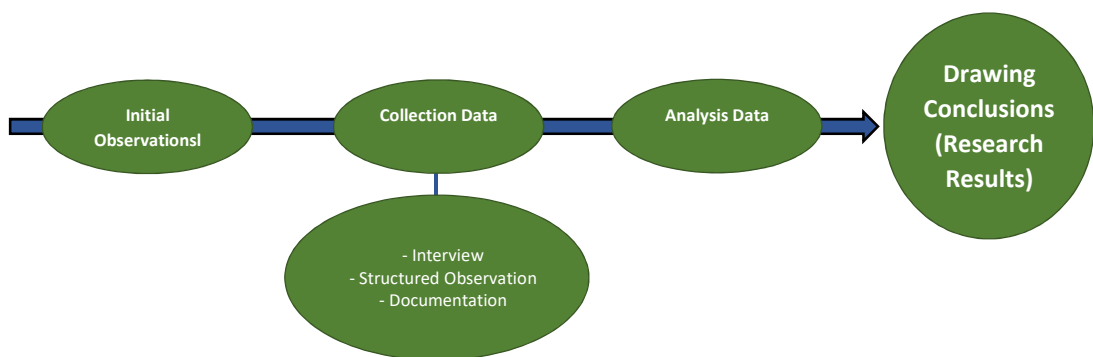
## **B. Research Method**

This research is a type of field research with a descriptive approach which is included in the qualitative research paradigm. According to Lexy J. Moleong, qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, actions, perceptions, motivations, concepts, and so on, holistically by describing them narratively in a natural context (Moleong, 2012). Indra Prasetya also stated that qualitative research emphasizes a deep understanding of problems rather than seeking

generalizations, using indepth analysis techniques to examine cases in detail. This approach holds that each problem has unique characteristics and is different from one another, so that qualitative research focuses on examining individual cases (Prasetia, 2022).

Creswell stated that in the context of qualitative data, there are four data collection methods that are commonly used, namely observation, interviews, documentation, and the use of audiovisual tools (Mulyadi et al., 2019). However, in this research, only data collection methods through observation, interviews and documentation were used without involving audiovisual tools. The subjects in this research were students involved in the implementation of International KKN and partners, in this case the management of the Al-Hidayah Foundation who were the interviewees. Observations were carried out by observing preparation, implementation and post-implementation activities of International KKN. Meanwhile, documentation is used to obtain data from reports on International KKN activities in Thailand in previous years.

After successfully collecting data, the next step is to carry out data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model. This data analysis process includes several stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, data verification, and drawing conclusions. During the research, these stages took place iteratively (Salim & Syahrur, 2012). At the start of the research, the focus was not yet clearly defined and the scope of the research was still very broad. However, after conducting interviews, the focus of the research began to become more focused with additional data support from documentation results. After that, the research continued by conducting structured observations in August 2023 to obtain more in-depth and specific data. In this research, data triangulation techniques were applied to ensure data validity. Researchers checked the accuracy of the data by involving several sources, namely students and partners. The final research process is drawing conclusions from the results of the research that has been carried out.



**Picture 1. Research Flow**

### **C. Results and Discussion**

Al-Hidayah Foundation is a foundation that operates in the education sector, especially to improve the quality of education in both Thailand and Indonesia. In this case, the Al-Hidayah Foundation has taken part in the MoU and MoA between the UMSU Islamic Religion Faculty and the Al-Hidayah Foundation in Hat Yai, Songkhla. During its development, the Al-Hidayah Foundation has attracted more than two hundred schools in Thailand to be involved in efforts to improve the quality of education, both in Thai schools and efforts to improve the experience of students who carry out KKN from various universities, especially the UMSU Faculty of Islamic Religion.

Institution Islamic education at all levels, participation is recommended implement inclusive programs in environment, for equality education for all is possible immediately materialized. And for parents who have children with needs specifically, it is recommended not to ignoring children's rights, especially the right to obtain decent education (Harfiani, 2019). The results (Mavianti, 2020) showed that the learning of Islamic education uses systematic learning planning that involves related elements according to competence to support the success of learning. Furthermore, the learning process is designed attractively to foster student interest in learning. In addition, students are also given motivation to want to excel in accordance with the abilities of each student. The results showed that the learning of Islamic education uses systematic learning planning that involves related elements according to competence to support the success of learning. Furthermore, the learning process is designed attractively to foster student interest in learning. In addition, students are also given motivation to want to excel in accordance with the abilities of each student.

In the first period, namely 2019 until the final period in 2023, the process of implementing International KKN activities at the Islamic Faculty in Thailand always begins with observation. The form of observation was that the leadership of the Faculty of Islamic Religion visited the Al-Hidayah Foundation in 2019. The purpose of the visit from the leadership of the Faculty of Islamic Religion was to hold a joint meeting with the Al-Hidayah Foundation to reach an agreement in the form of an MoU and MoA. The results of this implementation gave birth to a collaborative relationship between the UMSU Islamic Faculty and the Alhidayah Foundation on the KKN program at the international level. The schools used as placements for students in carrying out KKN consist of several areas, namely Bangkok and the southern part of Thailand, namely Hat Yai. The process of implementing KKN is to subsidize several schools. In the meeting between the Faculty of Islamic Religion and the Al-Hidayah Foundation, the discussion also

touched on the context of preparation and management of the implementation of KKN activities, starting from philosophical matters such as the meaning of implementing KKN at the international level to technical matters, such as preparation of transportation and accommodation. , and activities during the KKN program running in Thai schools.

Al-Hidayah Foundation is a non-profit foundation. In this collaboration, the Islamic Religion does not provide foundation funds to this party. On the other hand, the faculty provides incentives or financial support to the schools where students are placed. These funds are used to meet students' food costs while they are undergoing a one-month KKN program in Thailand. This shows that this collaboration is based on non-profit principles and mutually beneficial cooperation between the Faculty of Islamic Religion, the Al-Hidayah Foundation, and schools that are partners in implementing International KKN.

Before the KKN program was implemented, the Islamic Faculty first carried out preparations in the form of socialization, networking and selection, administration and training for students before departing for Thailand. This preparatory activity starts from November to July of the following year. The training given to students is in the form of soft skills preparation, in this case preparation of Thai, Arabic and English. The reason for preparing Arabic and English is because the teachers in Thai schools are only able to communicate in Arabic and English. Meanwhile, Thai language preparation is studied because children studying in the Bangkok area, even though they are Muslims, are generally only able to communicate in Thai and cannot use Malay. In August, KKN was implemented by sending students to Thailand. Upon arrival in Thailand, they were handed over to the Al-Hidayah Foundation to be given coaching and then placed in Muslim schools in Thailand covering the Bangkok and Hat Yai areas.



**Figure 2.**  
**Coaching activities from the Chair of the Al-Hidayah Foundation**

The impact received by students through the Community Service Program (KKN) can be divided into several important aspects. First, this program

provides students with valuable international experience. They have the opportunity to interact with different languages, ethnicities, cultures and countries from their environment. These differences create challenges that enable students to face various situations in a very diverse era of globalization. In doing so, students develop intercultural skills that are important in an increasingly connected world.

The second aspect is learning about interactions between Thai and Indonesian people, especially in the context of the Faculty of Islamic Religion. The KKN program allows students to understand how Islamic-based friendly relations exist between the two countries. This not only enriches their understanding of culture and religion, but also promotes intercultural dialogue which is important in building harmonious relations between Muslim communities.

Lastly, the KKN program in Thailand can also be a window for students to understand the development of Muslim activities in Thailand. They have the opportunity to see and experience various activities carried out by the Muslim community there, and vice versa, also help in providing information about the Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra (UMSU) to Thai children. This contributes to cultural exchange and increasing insight between nations as well as strengthening cooperation between the two countries in terms of education and culture.

From the results of the research carried out, it was found that the Al-Hidayah Foundation contributed to improving the quality of graduates of the Islamic Faculty through the KKN program carried out. Some of these contributions are improving the quality of education, human empowerment and improving international relations.

### **Improving the Quality of Education**

The research results show that the Community Service Program (KKN) supported by the Al-Hidayah Foundation has had a positive impact on the quality of education provided by the UMSU Islamic Faculty. This KKN program allows students to experience a significant increase in the quality of learning. One of the main aspects that influences the quality of education is students' ability to apply the knowledge they gain in class in real-world situations. This is what is meant by community-based education as stated in Republic of Indonesia Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, that the implementation of education is based on religious, social, cultural characteristics, aspirations and community potential as the embodiment of education from, by and for the community (Law-Republic of Indonesia Law, 2003). In the context of KKN in Thailand, students have the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they gain in the classroom in real life situations, especially in the schools where they are

placed. Students not only learn academically, but also experience a deeper understanding of how theory can be applied in practice.

In addition, collaboration with the Al-Hidayah Foundation provides additional access to valuable resources and guidance for students of the Faculty of Islamic Religion. This helps students develop practical skills that are relevant in the real world. In a supportive environment, students can experience the important role of the Al-Hidayah Foundation in improving the quality of their education. Therefore, the KKN program supported by the foundation not only provides valuable field experience, but also serves as a profitable and relevant learning tool.

### **Student Empowerment**

The research results also show the contribution of the Al-Hidayah Foundation in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Faculty graduates in student empowerment. This provides an opportunity for students to be directly involved in activities within the school environment that have a positive impact. Students are not only observers, but also play an active role in carrying out activities related to education. This involvement includes teaching, organizing extracurricular activities, providing tutoring, and participating in activities aimed at improving the quality of education in these schools.

During the implementation of KKN activities, students also get the opportunity to develop leadership skills that are important in their career development. Leadership is the skill of influencing other individuals so that they behave or act in accordance with expectations. Leadership also involves the ability to motivate other people to work together to achieve common goals (Hasanah et al., 2023). Students are given the responsibility to manage and coordinate various school activities. Initiative, wise decision making, and the ability to lead a team are important aspects that they develop while undergoing the KKN program.

Apart from that, teamwork is also a key element in the student experience. They must work together with peers, teachers, school staff, and members of the local community. It teaches students the importance of collaboration, effective communication, and respect for diversity of opinion in achieving common goals.

Social empowerment is another component that emerges from this program. Students help improve school and educational conditions. They are directly involved in efforts to improve the quality of education in the neighborhood, which in turn deepens their understanding of social responsibility. This encourages them to play an active role in improving society and take greater responsibility for the social problems they encounter.

In undergoing the KKN program, students also experience increased self-confidence. Positive experiences in facing real challenges and making meaningful contributions that make them more confident in their own abilities. Ali Rachman (2019) in his research results revealed that students' self-confidence has a significant influence on their actualization in learning (Rachman, 2019). When students have good self-confidence, it will have a positive impact on their attitude in pursuing larger personal and academic goals.

Thus, the KKN Program supported by the Al-Hidayah Foundation not only provides educational benefits, but also becomes an important forum for empowering students in various aspects. Through active involvement in school activities that have a positive impact, FAI students experience significant growth in self-understanding, development of leadership skills, effective teamwork, and a deeper understanding of their social responsibilities in society. Therefore, empowering students is the same as improving the quality of their education. Salma Nur Azizah Rahmawati and Achmad Supriyanto explained in their research that education is a key factor in improving individual quality. Through empowering superior human resources, the quality of education will increase significantly (Rahmawati & Supriyanto, 2020). If the quality of student education increases, good quality graduates will be created within the Faculty of Islamic Studies.

### **Improved International Relations**

The collaboration between the UMSU Islamic Faculty and the Al-Hidayah Foundation is a significant initiative in strengthening international relations between the two institutions. Through this collaboration, the Faculty of Islamic Studies has succeeded in establishing close connections with the Al-Hidayah Foundation, opening up opportunities for cultural exchange and cross-border learning which is very beneficial for both parties.

First, this collaboration has provided opportunities for students and teaching staff from FAI UMSU to be involved in educational and humanitarian projects abroad which are supported by the Al-Hidayah Foundation in Thailand. This not only helps broaden their horizons and experiences, but also allows them to contribute to improving the quality of education. Apart from that, this also creates opportunities for in-depth cultural exchange, where students and teaching staff from the Faculty of Islamic Religion can learn about culture such as language. Language is an expression of human culture that has unique characteristics that reflect the cultural richness of a society. Language differences can be considered as a sign of cultural variations in different regions. Language has an important role in giving individuals an identity, determining their position in global society, and shaping their perspective on the world (Renaldi et al., 2023).



Therefore, language is one of the cultural elements that can be used as learning. Apart from culture, students can also learn local values in Thailand, especially in the Muslim community there.

Second, the strong international relations between FAI UMSU and the Al-Hidayah Foundation also create opportunities for collaboration in service programs, research, conferences and academic exchanges that can improve the quality of education and empower students at FAI UMSU. Additionally, this creates a strong network between the academic communities at both institutions, which can help in sharing knowledge and experiences that support the development of better higher education. Thus, this collaboration has opened wide doors for cross-border learning and in-depth cultural exchange, which stimulates the growth and development of FAI UMSU in improving the quality of its graduates.

Third, this collaboration also provides opportunities for other faculties at the Muhammadiyah University of North Sumatra (UMSU) to be involved in similar collaborations with the Al-Hidayah Foundation. With the participation of various faculties, this collaboration can expand the scope of benefits, such as cultural exchange, improving the quality of education, and empowering students. Other faculties at UMSU can run similar programs that focus on improving the quality of graduates, such as the international KKN program, as well as other educational programs supported by the Al-Hidayah Foundation. This will open up opportunities for the exchange of knowledge and experience between fields of study, enrich the diversity of education in each faculty and promote cross-disciplinary collaboration that is beneficial for the development of the university and improving the quality of graduates.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This research explores the contribution of the Al-Hidayah Foundation in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Faculty (FAI) graduates through the Community Service Program (KKN) in Thailand. The research methodology includes interviews, observation, and data analysis of graduates who have taken part in the KKN program. The research results show that the Al-Hidayah Foundation's contribution through the KKN program in Thailand has had a positive impact on improving the quality of FAI graduates. This program provides students with the opportunity to develop academic competencies, social skills, and cross-cultural understanding.

In conclusion, the Al-Hidayah Foundation has significantly contributed to improving the quality of FAI graduates through the KKN program in Thailand. This program not only strengthens academic aspects, but also involves students in real community development experiences, creating

graduates who are not only academically competent, but also have social skills and awareness of the global context.

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