

# Transformation of the Quality of Hidayatullah College Graduates: Between Academic Competence and Islamic Character in the Riau Islands

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Received: 02/08/2025		Revised: 15/10/2025	Accepted: 22/12/2025
Abstract	<p>This study aims to analyze the transformation in the quality of graduates from Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands Province, focusing on two main aspects: academic competence and Islamic character. The research method used is a mixed method approach, combining a quantitative component through the distribution of questionnaires to final-year students and <i>alumni</i> (350 respondents) with a qualitative component through interviews with lecturers and graduate users (25 respondents). The study's results demonstrate academic competence. 72% of <i>alumni</i> stated that the course material is relevant to the needs of the world of work, especially in the fields of Islamic education, da'wah management, and Islamic economics. Twenty-eight percent consider the curriculum too theoretical. In terms of Islamic character, the study found that 82% of respondents have discipline in carrying out worship, 85% received positive appreciation from graduate users regarding social morals, and 62% are involved in Islamic leadership activities. This study implies that Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands has successfully transformed the quality of its graduates by emphasizing strong Islamic character aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive educational model that focuses not only on the religiosity aspect but also on the relevance of graduates.</p>		
Keywords	Academic Competence; Graduate Quality; Hidayatullah; Higher Education; Islamic Character		
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Graduate quality is a fundamental indicator reflecting the success of higher education. In the context of Islamic education, graduate quality is measured not only by academic achievement but also by the quality of character, spirituality, and moral integrity that students possess upon completion of their studies (Falaah et al., 2025). Hidayatullah College, as one of the Islamic-based higher education institutions operating in the Riau Islands Province, has a significant responsibility to produce graduates who are competitive, adaptive, and possess Islamic character (Iqbal et al., 2022). The challenges of globalization, digitalization, and the demands of the international workplace necessitate that Islamic universities undertake a comprehensive and sustainable transformation of graduate quality.

The integration of academic competence and Islamic character within educational institutions and



organizations, based on religious values, has received increasing attention in recent years. This aligns with the needs of the modern workplace, which demands employees not only to be intellectually competent but also to possess strong moral character in accordance with Islamic values (Nurjehan, 2022). Hidayatullah College, as an Islamic-based human resource development and cadre organization, has implemented various integrative strategies to align academic competence development with the development of Islamic character. This approach is considered in line with the global trend of values-based organizations that emphasize integrity, ethics, and spirituality as core competencies for employees (Qadimunnur et al., 2022).

The integration of academic competency and Islamic character has a positive impact on employee performance, discipline, and loyalty. A study by Jannah & Nabila (2023) revealed that institutions implementing human resource development based on academic competency and Islamic morals experienced significant increases in employee productivity and effectiveness. Another finding from Fuad et al. (2024) confirmed that values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ihsan* (goodness), and honesty, instilled alongside academic development, can strengthen organizational culture and foster employee professionalism.

The research results demonstrate the effectiveness of this integrative approach. Academic training, including digital literacy, research skills enhancement, and managerial development, is implemented simultaneously with character development through *halaqah* (Islamic religious gatherings), values mentoring, and *tarbawi* (Islamic education) workshops. In his research on the Hidayatullah College training program, Mahendra et al. (2022) found that training participants experienced increased intellectual competence while strengthening their Islamic character in aspects of discipline, responsibility, and work etiquette. These findings confirm that an integrative approach not only improves technical capabilities but also produces employees who are more committed and religiously oriented in carrying out their duties (Muhammad Syaifudin, 2022). Research conducted by Pratiwi (2020) on the application of the Islamic Competency Framework in modern Islamic organizations is also relevant. He stated that a competency framework based on the dimensions of *ilmiah* (academics), *akhlaqiyah* (character), and *ruhiyah* (spirituality) has been proven to improve organizational performance and foster a values-based work culture (Linando, 2022).

Transforming graduate quality is not merely about adapting the curriculum to job market needs, but also strengthening Islamic values in the educational process (Sawaluddin, Imran Rido, Koii Sahbudin Harahap, 2024). Islamic higher education has a mandate to produce *insan kamil* (complete human beings), individuals who excel in science and technology while still upholding noble moral values (L. H. Harahap, 2023). Amri emphasized that Islamic higher education must prioritize the integration of science and morality as a key pillar in shaping the quality of graduates (Amri et al., 2022). Therefore, the process of graduate transformation should not be confined to a purely utilitarian paradigm, but rather grounded in a holistic vision of Islamic education (Ahmad Zainuri, 2022).

In the era of Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, graduate quality is determined by their ability to master digital skills, think critically, and adapt to rapid change (Peters & Fàbregues, 2024). However, Islamic education offers a different perspective by emphasizing the balance between intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence (Oldham & McLoughlin, 2025). According to Abdul Aziz, Islamic universities are required to produce graduates who can utilize digital technology without losing their Islamic identity (Aziz, 2022). This emphasizes the importance of a graduate quality transformation strategy that balances academic competence and Islamic character development (Saraswati & Lambert, 2023).

Furthermore, the quality of graduates is greatly influenced by the quality of learning, the competence of faculty members, and the academic culture developed by the institution. Research by Sari found that graduates from Islamic universities with soft skills and Islamic moral development have higher job readiness than those focused solely on academic achievement (Sari, 2024). This means that

Islamic values serve as added value, increasing graduates' competitiveness in the workplace (Zhou et al., 2025).

A recent study on the quality of graduates from Islamic higher education institutions consistently demonstrates the importance of integrating academic aspects with Islamic character. Nurhasnawati, et.al (2025) It was found that systematically fostering Islamic character within the campus environment has a significant impact on students' work ethic and responsibility after graduation. This finding aligns with Pramesti et.al, perspective, which emphasizes that the competitiveness of graduates in border regions like the Riau Islands can be enhanced through a combination of mastery of academic competencies and the development of Islamic spirituality (Pramesti et al., 2024).

On the other hand, international literature also supports this view. Pertiwi et.al proposed the concept of holistic education at Islamic universities, which integrates intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development in a balanced manner (Pertiwi et al., 2023). This concept is relevant for Hidayatullah College, which pursues the vision of producing a superior generation with Islamic character (Adriansyah et al., 2025). From a more contextual perspective, Husein (2025) emphasized the importance of an industry-based curriculum that remains rooted in sharia values, so that Islamic College graduates do not lose their spiritual orientation despite the currents of globalization (K. S. Harahap & Sawaluddin, 2025).

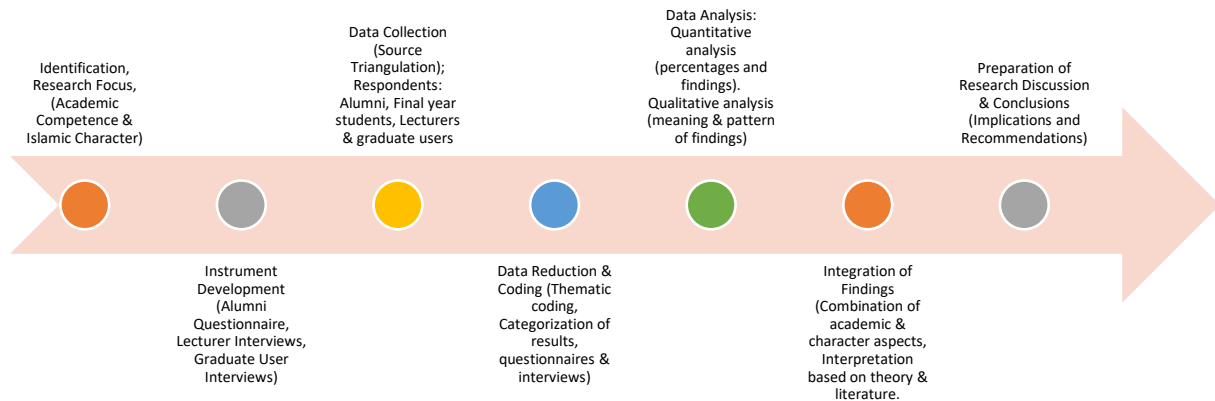
The literature also highlights the role of digitalization in shaping the quality of graduates. Syahroni stated that digitalization presents significant opportunities for Islamic higher education institutions to expand access to education and enhance the quality of learning (Syahroni, 2025). However, the challenge that arises is how to ensure Islamic values remain the foundation of digital-based learning (Rianto et al., 2022). Therefore, integrating technology with Islamic character education is a crucial element in the strategy for transforming graduate quality in the era of digital disruption (Wiguna et al., 2023).

From the literature review, it can be concluded that the quality of graduates of Islamic universities is influenced by two main dimensions: (1) strengthening academic competencies in accordance with the demands of the global era and industrial needs, and (2) fostering Islamic character that ensures graduates have integrity, noble morals, and strong spirituality. Thus, Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands faces the urgent need to design an educational model that can integrate these two dimensions harmoniously. This study aims to analyze the transformation in the quality of graduates from Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands Province, focusing on two main aspects: academic competence and Islamic character.

## **2. METHODS**

This study uses a mixed methods approach with a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously, then analyzed separately and integrated at the interpretation stage (Suwandi, 2021). This approach was chosen because the issue of graduate quality concerns aspects of academic competence (which can be measured) and Islamic character (which needs to be understood in depth) (Selznick, 2024). The study population consisted of 350 final-year students, *alumni* from the last 3–5 years, lecturers, and 25 graduate users at Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands. The sample was determined through a combination of stratified random sampling (for the quantitative survey) and purposive sampling (for interviews and FGDs) (Lim et al., 2023). The data collection instruments consisted of: (1) a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire to measure academic competence and Islamic character; (2) semi-structured interviews with leaders, lecturers, *alumni*, and employers; (3) student/*alumni* FGDs; and (4) document analysis (curriculum, internal quality reports, and tracer studies)(Nugraha, Prasetyo, Sugiharti, Lhutfi, Widyaningsih, Triantoro, Ong, Young, Persada, Kristamtomo Putra, et al., 2023).

After the quantitative and qualitative analyses are completed, the two data streams will be integrated in the interpretation stage: (a) comparing mutually supporting findings (convergence), (b) explaining differences (divergence), and (c) developing new insights emerging from the data synthesis. This integration provides a comprehensive view of the state of academic competence and the quality of Islamic character among graduates, as well as transformation mechanisms at the institutional level (Peters & Fàbregues, 2024). For further details, see the research flowchart below:



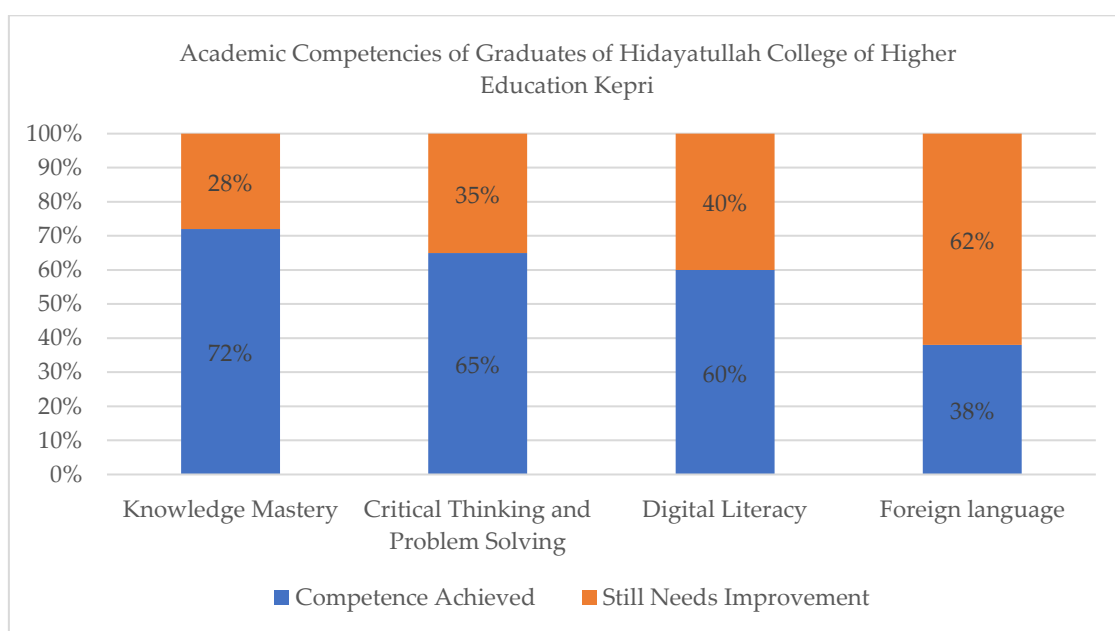
**Figure 1.** Stages of the Research Process

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### Findings

##### *Quality of Hidayatullah College Graduates: Academic Competence Aspect*

Research conducted among final-year students, alumni, lecturers, and graduate users indicates that the academic competency of Hidayatullah College graduates in the Riau Islands falls within the fair to good category. These findings are based on tracer study data, questionnaires, interviews, and curriculum document analysis, as shown in the graph below:



**Figure 2.** Academic Competencies of Graduates of Hidayatullah College of Higher Education, Kepri

### Quality of Graduates of Hidayatullah College: Islamic Character Aspects.

Research findings show that Islamic character is one of the primary strengths of graduates of Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands. As an Islamic-based higher education institution, this college prioritizes moral development, moral integrity, and the practice of Islamic values as its primary foundation, alongside academic achievement.

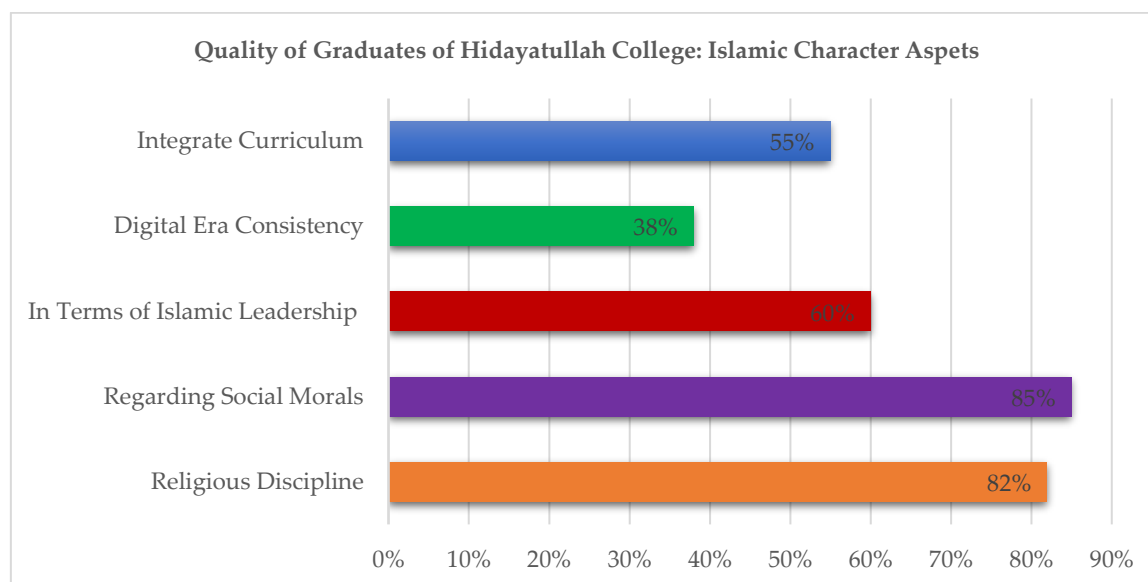


Figure 3. Quality of Graduates of Hidayatullah College: Islamic Character Aspects

## Discussion

### Quality of Hidayatullah College Graduates: Academic Competence Aspect

The research results contained in the graph above show that the academic competencies of graduates of Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands can be explained as follows:

*First*, in terms of mastery of subject knowledge, 72% of *alumni* respondents stated that the course material they received was aligned with the needs of the workforce, particularly in Islamic education, da'wah management, and Islamic economics. However, another 28% felt that the curriculum was too theoretical and did not emphasize practical, applicable skills enough (Lim et al., 2023).

*Second*, regarding critical thinking, analytical skills, and problem-solving, questionnaire results indicated that approximately 65% of final-year students felt capable of constructing academic arguments and conducting simple analyses in scientific writing. However, thesis examiners noted that students' analytical skills tended to be descriptive, not yet reaching the evaluative and critical levels (Nugraha, Prasetyo, Sugiharti, Lhutfi, Widyaningsih, Triantoro, Ong, Young, Persada, Kristamtomo Putra, et al., 2023).

*Third*, findings on digital literacy skills indicate a gap. Most students (approximately 60%) are already familiar with academic support applications, such as Mendeley, Google Scholar, and e-learning platforms. However, interviews with graduate users indicate that students' digital technology mastery is still limited to basic use, not yet reaching the level of utilizing technology for innovative research and professional communication (Peters & Fàbregues, 2024).

*Fourth*, regarding foreign languages (Arabic and English), this study found that passive skills (reading texts) were quite good, but active skills (speaking and academic writing) were still low. Questionnaire data showed that only 38% of respondents felt confident using a foreign language in international academic forums. This is seen as an obstacle to improving graduates' competitiveness in the era of globalization (Bakhtiari, 2006).

*Fifth*, in terms of research and publications, internal College data shows an increase in student involvement in collaborative research with lecturers since 2021. However, the quality of publications remains limited at the local and national levels, with very few works appearing in reputable international journals (Selznick, 2024).

*Sixth*, supporting factors for academic quality include the integration of an Islamic values-based curriculum, the involvement of lecturers in research guidance, and the strengthening of research methodology courses (Zvereva, 2023). Meanwhile, inhibiting factors identified include limited digital laboratory facilities, a lack of up-to-date literature in libraries, and weak international collaboration networks among universities (Alimron et al., 2023).

In general, these findings indicate that the quality of graduates of Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands in terms of academic competency is on the right track, but still requires significant improvement, especially in strengthening practical skills, advanced digital literacy, and mastery of foreign languages as a support for global competitiveness (Adima et al., 2025).

This finding is in line with Nugraha's (2023) Research indicates that the academic quality of Islamic College graduates continues to face challenges in terms of digital literacy and the integration of technology-based curricula. Meanwhile, Alimron's (2023) The study emphasized that academic mastery in Islamic universities must be combined with the development of Islamic character to produce graduates who excel both intellectually and morally. This is in line with the vision of Hidayatullah College, which not only produces graduates with academic abilities, but also those with Islamic integrity (Maisah et al., 2025).

Thus, it can be concluded that the quality of Hidayatullah College graduates in terms of academic competency has shown positive development, particularly in terms of the relevance of their fields of study to local and regional needs (Nely Ilmi Qoth'iyah, Luthfiyah, 2024). However, there are still gaps that need to be bridged, particularly in strengthening practical skills, digital literacy, and foreign language proficiency (Sumiati et al., 2024). Future improvement efforts should be directed at developing an adaptive curriculum, improving academic facilities, and expanding global academic collaboration networks

#### ***Quality of Graduates of Hidayatullah College: Islamic Character Aspects***

Research findings show that Islamic character is one of the primary strengths of graduates of Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands. As an Islamic-based higher education institution, this college prioritizes moral development, moral integrity, and the practice of Islamic values as its primary foundation, alongside academic achievement.

*First*, in terms of religious discipline and spirituality, the majority of *alumni* and students demonstrated a strong commitment to performing both obligatory and recommended acts of worship. Questionnaire data showed that 82% of student and *alumni* respondents felt the campus was successful in fostering religious habits, such as congregational prayer, Quran recitation, and internal da'wah activities. This demonstrates that the campus environment functions as an effective religious ecosystem for developing Islamic character (Iqbal et al., 2022).

*Second*, regarding social morals and social etiquette, interviews with lecturers and campus leaders confirmed that Hidayatullah graduates are known in the community as polite, disciplined, and socially conscious (Muzawir Munawarsyah, 2023). This finding is supported by the perceptions of graduate users (employers), who consider integrity, responsibility, and honesty to be key added values compared to graduates from other universities (Sundowo et al., 2024).

*Third*, in terms of Islamic leadership and da'wah, more than 60% of *alumni* working in the community are involved in religious activities, whether as teachers in educational institutions, mosque administrators, or community da'wah activists (Adriansyah et al., 2025). This reflects that the Islamic

leadership values instilled during college have been successfully internalized and applied within the community (Falaah et al., 2025).

*Fourth*, the findings also revealed challenges in fostering Islamic character, particularly in the digital era (Maisah et al., 2025). Several students reported difficulties maintaining consistent Islamic values when faced with the flow of social media and popular culture, which often align with Islamic values (Izzati et al., 2024). Although universities strive to integrate digital literacy based on Islamic values, not all students can control their use of technology (Aulia & Yuliyanti, 2024).

*Fifth*, the research results indicate a gap between the ideal curriculum and the reality of practice (Pramesti et al., 2024). Although courses on morality, education, and self-development based on Islamic values have been integrated into the curriculum, some students consider the approach to be normative and not fully applicable (Baen et al., 2025). Therefore, innovative Islamic character education methods that are more contextual and responsive to current developments are still needed (Wiguna et al., 2023).

In general, these findings suggest that graduates of Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands possess a competitive advantage in terms of Islamic character, as demonstrated by strong spirituality, noble morals, and da'wah-based leadership. However, strengthening the integration of Islamic values with the challenges of global digitalization remains a challenge for universities, ensuring that graduates are not only religious within the campus environment but also able to maintain Islamic values amidst modern social dynamics.

Based on the results and discussion of the research above, it is clear that the relationship between academic competence and Islamic character is mutually reinforcing and reciprocal: Islamic character shapes ethical academic behavior, while academic competence enriches the understanding of values so that moral implementation becomes more contextual and reflective (David Vykydal, Martin Foltá, 2020). Practically, students who have Islamic character reflected in academic honesty, learning discipline, responsibility, and commitment to worship tend to show learning motivation, perseverance in completing scientific assignments, and integrity in the research process (Herlambang et al., 2021). Empirical findings in the context of Islamic higher education indicate that the habituation of worship, value mentoring, and halaqah activities play a major role in strengthening the affective aspects that support the achievement of academic achievement (Alimron et al., 2023).

On the other hand, strong academic competencies such as critical thinking skills, research skills, digital literacy, and mastery of methodology enable students to understand Islamic teachings more deeply, systematically, and relevantly to contemporary challenges (Herlambang et al., 2021). With established intellectual capacity, Islamic values can be interpreted and applied in concrete solutions (e.g., public policy, adaptive da'wah practices, social innovation). Therefore, academic competencies serve not merely as instrumental goals but as transformative tools that enrich the moral and practical dimensions of Islamic values in professional life. Studies of mixed-methods education demonstrate that the integration of values and technology/pedagogy must be systematically managed for this synergy to be effective (Peters & Fàbregues, 2023).

In the modern context, including the digital era and Society 5.0, both face new opportunities and challenges. Digital literacy and digital ethics are crucial bridges for graduates to maintain Islamic integrity when interacting in cyberspace (Elena Soltovets, Oxana Chigisheva, 2020). Studies on digital ethics emphasize that technical literacy without an ethical dimension is prone to producing behavior that is counterproductive to values. Therefore, a successful curriculum combines technical training (e.g., the use of digital research tools, professional communication) with digital ethics modules based on Islamic values. This allows technical competency to facilitate the practice of character, and conversely, Islamic character guides the responsible use of technical competency (Zvereva, 2023).

Empirically, several studies in Indonesia have found a positive correlation between character education programs and job readiness, particularly in Islamic institutions that implement a structured

development model (Jufrizen et al., 2020). These findings suggest that graduates who receive character development in addition to academic learning are more likely to demonstrate the professional behaviors desired by employers (e.g., honesty, responsibility, and teamwork). However, they often still require strengthening of practical technical skills. In other words, Islamic character enhances graduates' value proposition, but academic/technical competitiveness remains necessary for access to broader opportunities (Wiguna et al., 2023).

From the explanation and empirical analysis above, it can be concluded that the transformation of the quality of Hidayatullah College graduates must place the integration of academic competencies and Islamic character as a central and simultaneous goal (Amri et al., 2022). A strong Islamic character has been proven to be a moral and social capital that strengthens the work ethic and trust of graduate users; however, without improving relevant academic competencies (especially analytical skills, advanced digital literacy, and active foreign languages), graduates will be limited in their competitiveness at the local/regional level (Rosidah & Sasmita, 2022). Therefore, further research and institutional policies need to be directed at the following efforts: (1) developing an integrated curriculum that inserts affective indicators (values) in each learning outcome; (2) adding a digital literacy module that combines ethical aspects (digital ethics) and practical research skills; (3) an active language development program and internships/industry partnerships to strengthen employability; and (4) a quality assurance (QA) mechanism that monitors academic indicators as well as character indicators longitudinally. These steps ensure that Hidayatullah graduates are not only morally superior but also competitive and adaptive in both national and global contexts (Nugraha, et al., 2023).

Scientifically, the recommended research direction is longitudinal and interventional studies: longitudinal research to observe the consistency of character and competency development of graduates in the period of 3–10 years post-graduation, as well as experimental/quasi-experimental research that tests the effectiveness of integrative programs (e.g., digital ethics module + internship + *halaqah* mentoring) on employability outcomes and professional integrity. This approach will provide stronger causal evidence for future-oriented Islamic higher education policies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the transformation of the quality of graduates at Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands has shown positive results. The results show that, in terms of academic competency, 72% of *alumni* stated that the course material was relevant to the needs of the workforce, especially in the fields of Islamic education, *da'wah* management, and Islamic economics. However, 28% still considered the curriculum too theoretical. In terms of Islamic character, it was found that 82% of respondents demonstrated discipline in carrying out religious duties, 85% received positive feedback from graduate users regarding their social morals, and 62% were involved in Islamic leadership activities. This study suggests that Hidayatullah College in the Riau Islands has successfully enhanced the quality of its graduates by emphasizing the importance of strong Islamic character aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive educational model that focuses not only on the religiosity aspect but also on the relevance of graduates.

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