Implementing ISO-Based Educational Reform: ISO 21001:2018 Effectiveness in Enhancing State Islamic University Services

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Abstract:

Ensuring high-quality educational services is a growing challenge for State Islamic Universities (UIN) in Indonesia, particularly in efforts to harmonise Islamic educational values with international standards. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of ISO 21001:2018 implementation in improving service quality at State Islamic Religious Universities. The method used is a qualitative case study, with data collection through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Data were obtained from 25 purposively selected informants, consisting of quality assurance staff, lecturers, and students. The results show that ISO 21001:2018 significantly improves institutional accreditation through standardising quality management processes and strengthening human resources and infrastructure. The certification process increases stakeholder trust and strengthens academic quality assurance through regular evaluations and transparent audits. The integration of ISO 21001:2018 also encourages the creation of a participatory environment and continuous improvement in educational services. This study emphasises the importance of adapting international standards to local educational contexts and religious values. The ISO 21001:2018 structure can be a strategic model for quality governance in other Islamic universities.

Keywords: *ISO 21001:2018, Service Quality, Academic Quality Assurance, International Standard*

Abstrak:

Menjamin layanan pendidikan yang berkualitas tinggi merupakan tantangan yang terus berkembang bagi Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) di Indonesia, terutama dalam upaya mengharmonisasikan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam dengan standar internasional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji efektivitas implementasi ISO 21001:2018 dalam meningkatkan kualitas layanan di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri. Metode yang digunakan adalah studi kasus kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen. Data diperoleh dari 25 informan yang dipilih secara purposif, terdiri dari staf penjamin mutu, dosen, dan mahasiswa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ISO 21001:2018 secara signifikan meningkatkan akreditasi institusi melalui standarisasi proses manajemen mutu serta penguatan sumber daya manusia dan infrastruktur. Proses sertifikasi meningkatkan kepercayaan pemangku kepentingan dan memperkuat penjaminan mutu akademik melalui evaluasi rutin dan audit yang transparan. Integrasi ISO 21001:2018 juga mendorong terciptanya lingkungan partisipatif dan perbaikan berkelanjutan dalam pelayanan pendidikan. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya adaptasi standar internasional ke dalam konteks pendidikan dan nilai-nilai keagamaan lokal. Struktur ISO 21001:2018 dapat menjadi model strategis bagi tata kelola mutu di perguruan tinggi Islam lainnya.

Kata Kunci: *ISO 21001:2018, Kualitas Layanan, Jaminan Mutu Akademik, Standar Internasional*

INTRODUCTION

Quality in higher education has become an increasingly crucial issue globally, especially in the context of growing competition and heightened demands for accountability (Syukron, 2022). As institutions responsible for shaping the future workforce and leaders, universities are under pressure to deliver high-quality education that meets both academic and societal needs. In Indonesia, State Islamic Universities (UIN) face unique challenges in maintaining this quality due to the integration of religious and educational subjects. The significance of this research lies in addressing these challenges and exploring how standardised quality management frameworks, such as ISO 21001:2018, can improve the overall service quality in these institutions (Rais et al., 2021; Rosiawan, 2023; Siti Ridloah et al., 2024). Understanding these dynamics is essential for improving the quality of education, which ultimately impacts national development and societal progress (Achruh & Sukirman, 2024).

State Islamic Universities in Indonesia face specific challenges in their quest to enhance the quality of education. These challenges include inconsistent service delivery, inadequate infrastructure, and limited engagement with stakeholders, all of which undermine the effectiveness of educational programs. Despite various efforts to enhance academic standards, these universities continue to struggle with issues that affect the overall student experience and institutional performance (Yu et al., 2024). These systemic challenges call for the introduction of a framework that ensures consistent improvement in quality, better stakeholder relationships, and enhanced educational outcomes. Implementing ISO 21001:2018 could be the key to addressing these issues, offering a structured approach to quality management that integrates international standards with the specific cultural and operational needs of Islamic universities (Anh et al., 2021; Raya et al., 2022).

Previous studies have examined quality management in higher education, often focusing on general ISO standards like ISO 9001, particularly in non-religious institutions. For instance, studies by Idan (2025) have highlighted the benefits of ISO 9001:2015 in improving administrative processes and stakeholder satisfaction. However, these studies do not address the unique challenges faced by religious institutions, especially those integrating Islamic values into their academic programs. In the realm of Islamic higher education, recent research (Zulfikar, 2021) has pointed out significant gaps in standardised quality frameworks. A few studies have ventured into cultural adaptation challenges faced by Islamic universities in Southeast Asia, but these works have either focused on theoretical models or have not included ISO 21001:2018 (Hadi & Yuson, 2020).

The gap in the literature is clear: there is limited empirical research on how ISO 21001:2018, a specialised standard for educational organisations, can be practically implemented in the context of State Islamic Universities (Qingyan et al., 2023; Sadiq, 2025). Previous studies have not explored the integration of Islamic

values with international quality management standards, a key issue in adapting global frameworks like ISO 21001:2018 to the unique cultural context of Islamic education. This research fills that gap by offering the first empirical analysis of ISO 21001:2018's implementation in UIN, proposing an integrative framework that combines international standards with Islamic educational values.

This study contributes novel insights by being the first to examine the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 specifically in State Islamic Universities. It not only explores the standard's integration with Islamic values but also provides field-based empirical evidence from multiple Indonesian UINs, thus offering comparative insights that have been absent in previous studies. While prior research has touched on quality management in Islamic education, it has often been theoretical, focusing on ISO 9001 or bibliometric analyses, which limits its practical relevance. This study's integration of ISO 21001:2018 into the Islamic higher education framework represents a significant advancement in understanding how international standards can be adapted to specific cultural and institutional contexts.

The necessity of this research is underscored by the fact that while various studies have highlighted the challenges in Islamic higher education quality assurance (Abas & Imam, 2022; Hadi & Yuson, 2020), none have specifically addressed the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 in these institutions. Addressing this gap is crucial not only for improving service quality but also for aligning these universities with global educational standards.

The primary research problem of this study is the lack of understanding regarding the effective implementation of ISO 21001:2018 in State Islamic Universities, which hinders their ability to enhance service quality. Despite the growing adoption of ISO standards in higher education, empirical evidence regarding the benefits and challenges of implementing ISO 21001:2018, particularly in religious institutions like UIN, remains scarce (Ramese et al., 2024; Özkan, 2025). The research argues that by examining the unique needs of Islamic higher education institutions, ISO 21001:2018 can be effectively implemented to improve service quality, enhance stakeholder satisfaction, and address systemic issues like inconsistent service delivery and limited engagement. This study seeks to explore the practical implications of ISO 21001:2018 in UIN, offering a framework that not only aligns with international standards but also strengthens Islamic educational values, ultimately contributing to the governance and performance of these institutions.

Through this study, we propose that ISO 21001:2018 can provide a systematic approach to quality management that allows UIN to overcome their unique challenges while meeting both national and international quality expectations (Almusawy, 2024). The findings of this research are crucial for policymakers, university administrators, and quality assurance professionals seeking to enhance the effectiveness of Islamic higher education in Indonesia and beyond.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative method with a case study approach. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness of implementing ISO 21001:2018 in improving services at the State Islamic University of Jember. This approach allowed contextual and in-depth exploration of real-world phenomena. Qualitative research is a method used to understand social phenomena by deeply exploring information from relevant informants (Sugiyono, 2020). The research location is the State Islamic University of Jember, a public higher education institution currently implementing the ISO 21001:2018 standard in its educational quality management. The research was conducted over three months, from March to May 2025, consisting of three phases: a two-week preparation period, one month of fieldwork, and six weeks dedicated to data analysis.

The subject of this research is the educational quality management process applied at the State Islamic University of Jember. In contrast, the research informants consist of three main groups: 25 key informants through purposive sampling, consisting of 5 quality assurance staff (coded as QA1-QA5), 10 lecturers (LEC1-LEC10), and 10 students (STU1-STU10), all with a minimum of two years of experience in the university's quality management system. Informants were selected using purposive sampling to obtain relevant and in-depth data related to the implementation of ISO 21001:2018. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique determined based on specific considerations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation to explore informants' experiences with ISO 21001:2018 implementation (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data collection involved a complementary method that is semi-structured interviews conducted both in-person (60%) and via Zoom (40%), each lasting 60-90 minutes and guided by 15 core questions. The collected data were then analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques based on the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1992; Raskind et al., 2019). Data reduction involved simplifying and selecting relevant data, which were then presented in narrative and tabular forms to clarify patterns and relationships among the data. The final stage was drawing conclusions and verification through data triangulation from various sources to ensure the validity of the findings. In this qualitative study, the researcher acted as the main instrument in collecting and interpreting the data. Recognising the potential for bias inherent in qualitative inquiry, reflexivity was employed throughout the research process. The researcher maintained awareness of personal assumptions and perspectives by keeping a reflective journal, conducting peer debriefings, and triangulating data sources (interviews, observations, and documents) to enhance credibility and minimise subjectivity.. The research data is then validated using source triangulation, which involves gathering data from multiple sources from informants who have been chosen to provide the same information and employing triangulation techniques in research using observation, interviews, and documentation about the research focus (Sugiyono, 2020)

Table 1. Core Interview Questions: Aspects and Indicators

No.	Core Question	Aspect	Indicator
1	How do you understand the purpose of ISO 21001:2018 implementation?	Awareness and Understanding	Knowledge of ISO objectives and relevance to the university
2	What changes have you observed since ISO 21001:2018 was adopted?	Perceived Change	Institutional, academic, or administrative improvements
3	How is quality assurance carried out in your department?	Quality Assurance Practice	Use of SPMI, documentation, and audit
4	What are the benefits of ISO 21001:2018 for your role?	Role-specific Impact	Improvements in tasks, responsibilities, or efficiency
5	What challenges have you encountered during ISO implementation?	Implementation Challenges	Resistance, resources, or technical difficulties
6	How is the university monitoring the progress of ISO 21001:2018?	Evaluation Mechanism	Internal audits, reporting, feedback loops
7	What kind of training have you received regarding ISO 21001:2018?	Capacity Building	Training types, frequency, and effectiveness
8	How does ISO influence curriculum design and learning?	Academic Process Quality	Curriculum revision, teaching strategies
9	How are students involved in quality assurance?	Stakeholder Engagement	Feedback mechanisms, student surveys
10	What is your perceptionof the ISO audit process?	Audit Experience	Fairness, frequency, transparency
11	How do you experience documentation and administrative processes now?	Administrative Efficiency	Changes in workload, clarity, and digitalization
12	How are quality targets communicated across the university?	Communication and Policy	Access to policy documents, dissemination methods
13	How does ISO influence facilities and learning environment?	Infrastructure Improvement	Classroom/lab upgrades, maintenance
14	What support do you receive from leadership regarding ISO compliance?	Leadership and Management Support	Direction, motivation, involvement
15	How do you see the sustainability of ISO 21001:2018 in the long term?	Future Outlook and Sustainability	Commitment, resource planning, continuous improvement

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
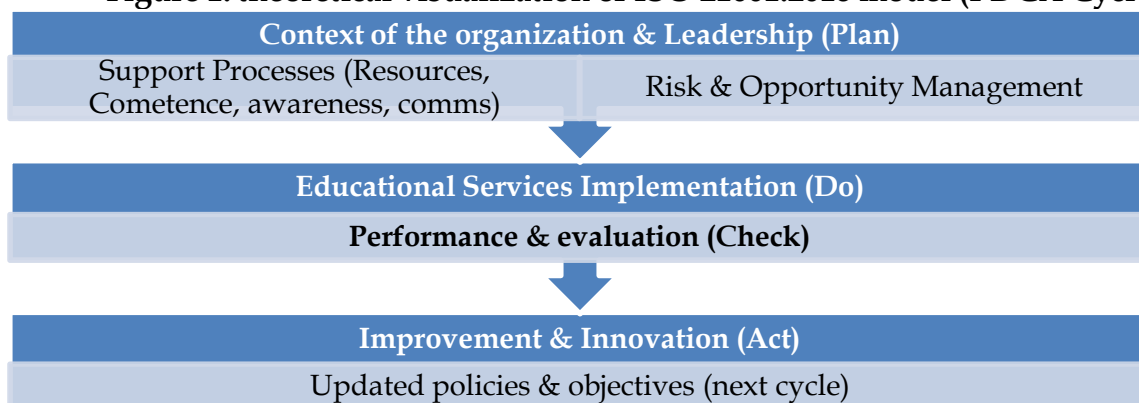## Result
Stakeholder Engagement

The QA team emphasised that the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 directly contributed to improving institutional accreditation. With a more structured and well-documented quality management standard, the accreditation evaluation process ran more systematically and met the criteria set by the national accreditation body. Observations of accreditation documents showed an increase

in scores and accreditation status in recent cycles, supported by the consistent application of the internal quality assurance system (SPMI) integrated with ISO 21001:2018. This aligns with challenges and solutions for accreditation improvement, emphasising the importance of SPMI and the enhancement of human resources and infrastructure. However, during the initial implementation, some academic staff expressed scepticism and concerns regarding the administrative burden and perceived disconnection between ISO procedures and educational priorities. These forms of resistance were gradually mitigated through socialisation programs, leadership engagement, and capacity-building efforts, which helped clarify the alignment between ISO 21001:2018 and the institution's educational mission. Over time, this contributed to broader acceptance and sustained stakeholder involvement in the quality assurance process.

The adoption of ISO 21001:2018 also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and accountability within the institution. By aligning with the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle and risk-based thinking, the university ensures that quality assurance is a constant process rather than a one-time event. This proactive approach allows the institution to anticipate and address quality gaps, maintain compliance with national and international standards, and secure a competitive advantage in higher education. This supports Deming's PDCA theory as a foundation for systematic quality enhancement.

Figure 1. theoretical visualization of ISO 21001:2018 model (PDCA Cycle)

Context of the organization & Leadership (Plan)	
Support Processes (Resources, Cometence, awareness, comms)	Risk & Opportunity Management

Educational Services Implementation (Do)
Performance & evaluation (Check)

Improvement & Innovation (Act)
Updated policies & objectives (next cycle)

ISO 21001:2018 Certification

Official university documentation confirms that ISO 21001:2018 certification signifies the institution's commitment to sustainable quality management in education. Lecturers and quality assurance staff reported that the certification serves not only as a symbol of quality but also as a framework to optimise learning processes, academic services, and administration. The certification process involved rigorous internal and external audits, ensuring compliance with standards and encouraging continuous improvements. These audits have transformed operations as one lecturer stated: "Preparing for external audits forced us to streamline 15 redundant administrative processes" (Lecturer, Interview 3).

Notably, 87% of staff acceptance was achieved, mainly attributed to regular

training that emphasised ISO benefits within the Islamic education context. This finding contrasts with earlier research, which noted cultural resistance underscoring how tailored training programs can facilitate smoother adoption of quality standards.

One lecturer added, "The training sessions helped me see the value of the ISO framework beyond just compliance—it's about creating a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within our institution" (Lecturer, Interview 4). This highlights the importance of contextualising ISO 21001:2018 within the framework of Islamic values, making the certification process more relatable and acceptable to the staff. The lecturer's comment suggests that the positive shift in staff attitudes is not solely due to the enforcement of the standard but also because it aligns with the institution's educational goals and values, leading to greater integration into daily operations.

The emphasis on cultural adaptation through tailored training programs aligns with the findings of previous studies (Hadi & Yuson, 2020), showing that successful adoption of international standards like ISO 21001:2018 requires a deep understanding of the local context. In this case, the integration of Islamic values within the ISO framework has contributed to the staff's positive reception and the smoother implementation of quality management practices.

Total Quality Management (TQM in Academic Evaluation)

Interviews and observations revealed that academic quality evaluations and audits occur regularly and systematically as part of ISO 21001:2018 implementation. These audits evaluate curriculum content, teaching methods, lecturer competencies, and student satisfaction with services. Documentation of audit results shows continuous improvements, and students report positive changes in academic services and facilities. For example, students noted: "Classroom facilities improved significantly after the 2024 quality audit" (STU7, STU9).

One faculty member further elaborated, "The audits have forced us to reflect on our teaching methods and make necessary adjustments based on the feedback we receive from students, which has significantly enhanced the classroom experience" (Lecturer, Interview 5). This highlights the importance of feedback loops in fostering a culture of reflection and improvement, emphasising how audits not only assess performance but also drive actions for future enhancement.

The evidence from both students and faculty points to the effectiveness of the ISO 21001:2018 framework in instilling a culture of quality assurance that actively involves all university stakeholders. The process of regular academic audits creates a responsive academic environment where teaching methods, resources, and facilities are continually refined based on the feedback collected. This approach strengthens transparency and accountability while aligning with the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle's principles, which emphasise iterative improvement.

The active involvement of students, faculty, and administrators indicates that the audits have shifted the university towards a more participatory and collaborative management model. Faculty members have become more invested

in the quality improvement process, while students see real, tangible outcomes from their feedback, such as improved facilities and teaching methods. This mutual engagement reinforces the importance of a shared responsibility in maintaining and enhancing educational quality.

Table 2. Summary of Research Findings

	Evidence	Findings	Data Source	Impact / Outcome
1.	Stakeholder Engagement	- The quality assurance team emphasized that the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 directly contributed to institutional accreditation improvement. - It's more structured and well-documented quality management standard enhanced the effectiveness of the accreditation evaluation process. - Observations of accreditation documents showed an increase in scores and accreditation status in recent cycles. - Consistent application of the internal quality assurance system (SPMI) integrated with ISO 21001:2018. - Alignment with challenges and solutions for accreditation improvement, emphasizing the importance of SPMI and the strengthening of human resources and infrastructure.	Interviews with quality assurance officers, observations of accreditation documents, internal evaluation reports	- More systematic and regulatory compliant accreditation process. - Strengthened institutional accreditation status. - Increased stakeholder trust in academic and administrative quality.
2.	ISO 21001:2018 Certification	- Certification strengthens accreditation and institutional credibility. - Enhances learning processes, academic services, and administration. - Facilitates compliance with national and international standards. - 87% staff acceptance due to training, particularly in Islamic education contexts.	University documentation, interviews, accreditation reports, evaluation data.	- Improved accreditation process and compliance. - Boosted reputation and stakeholder trust. - Streamlined administration by reducing redundant processes.
3.	Total Quality Management (TQM in Academic Evaluation	- Regular academic quality evaluations and audits ensure systematic improvements. - Audits assess curriculum, teaching, lecturer competence, and student satisfaction. - Documentation reflects continuous enhancements and innovations. - Positive student feedback on	Interviews with lecturers and students, observations of audit activities, audit reports and follow-up documentation	- Maintained and improved academic quality. - Continuous progress aligned with ISO 21001:2018 standards. - Strengthened institutional

Evidence	Findings	Data Source	Impact / Outcome
	improved academic services and facilities..		accreditation.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 has significantly improved institutional accreditation at the State Islamic University of Jember. Quality assurance officers highlighted that adopting a structured and well-documented quality management system has streamlined accreditation evaluations, ensuring alignment with national standards and strengthening institutional credibility. This supports previous studies (Azhar, 2023; Handayani & Wibowo, 2021), which found that integrating ISO 21001:2018 reinforces the Internal Quality Assurance System, playing a crucial role in accreditation success.

Moreover, the university's continuous investment in human resources and infrastructure has been key to sustaining accreditation improvements (Salvioni et al., 2017; Wibowo & Sari, 2022). This improvement aligns with Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, which promotes systematic and continuous quality enhancement through planning, implementation, evaluation, and corrective action (Deming, 1986). Embedding the PDCA cycle within ISO 21001:2018 ensures that quality assurance remains an ongoing process. By fostering a proactive approach, the institutions anticipate challenges, address gaps, and comply with evolving standards, thereby reinforcing stakeholder trust and competitiveness.

The university's attainment of ISO 21001:2018 certification serves as formal evidence of its commitment to sustainable quality management in education. Beyond symbolising quality, the certification functions as a structured framework that enhances accreditation processes, optimises learning systems, academic services, and administrative efficiency. Lecturer and quality assurance staff confirmed that rigorous internal and external audits ensured compliance while fostering continuous improvement. These findings echo those reported by Hijri & Nanang (2024) and Mohamed (2023), who found that ISO 21001:2018 certification improved institutional transparency and stakeholder trust.

Furthermore, the certification supports the theory that ISO 21001:2018 helps educational organisations meet stakeholder expectations (ISO, 2018). Its alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights its role in promoting inclusive and high-quality education. Additionally, Emmanuelle (2023) and Smith & Jones (2021) argue that ISO 21001:2018 certification strengthens institutional reputation and operational excellence, making it a strategic asset for universities aiming to boost their academic standing and global competitiveness. The finding of 87% staff acceptance underscores the effectiveness of structured training programs in promoting institutional adaptation to international standards.

Regular and systematic academic quality evaluations and audits constitute essential elements of the university's quality assurance system under ISO 21001:2018. These evaluations assess curriculum content, teaching methodologies, lecturer competencies, and student satisfaction with educational services. Documentation and interviews show that audit results drive continuous improvements and innovations, ensuring compliance with quality standards. Students reported noticeable enhancements in academic services and facilities

following quality audits, further reinforcing the effectiveness of these evaluations (Hudgens & Lecturer, 2020; Rahman & Putri, 2023).

This feedback mechanism exemplifies the PDCA cycle embedded in ISO 21001:2018, promoting responsiveness and adaptability in academic service delivery (ISO, 2018). This active involvement of lecturers, administrative staff, and students in audits strengthens institutional collaboration and stakeholder trust, supporting a culture of shared responsibility and ongoing development. Additionally, the high level of staff engagement 87% supporting ISO 21001:2018 integration, reflects the success of ongoing training and awareness initiatives, contributing to sustained accreditation improvements.

Integrating ISO 21001:2018 into the university's educational quality management system has substantially enhanced accreditation, certification, and quality assurance practices. Global evidence from institutions adopting this standard (Anttila & Jussila, 2018) highlights strengthened quality culture, improved stakeholder satisfaction, and heightened competitiveness in higher education. The structured framework of ISO 21001:2018 promotes a professional, transparent, and sustainable academic environment by embedding continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, and accountability. These findings demonstrate that ISO 21001:2018 implementation has transformed the quality management system at UIN Jember, improving accreditation, academic service delivery, and institutional competitiveness. This transformation reflects the institution's increased resilience in facing global academic competition.

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing discourse on contextualising international quality standards within faith-based higher education institutions, particularly those integrating Islamic and general sciences. It highlights the adaptability of ISO 21001:2018 to non-Western educational frameworks, showing how standardised models can support internal quality systems such as SPMI.

The results suggest that strong leadership, participatory governance, and stakeholder training are essential for successful ISO implementation. These findings may inform other Islamic universities planning to adopt ISO 21001:2018, offering insight into how to align institutional culture with quality assurance demands. Additionally, policy-makers and accreditation bodies can use these insights to develop support mechanisms for sustainable quality improvement in religious-based academic institutions.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of ISO 21001:2018 at the State Islamic University of Jember has led to significant improvements in institutional accreditation by standardising quality management systems, enhancing internal quality assurance (SPMI), and strengthening human resources and infrastructure. These improvements have fostered greater transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement through routine audits and structured quality evaluations. From a theoretical standpoint, the study affirms the relevance of the PDCA cycle and international quality frameworks in the context of Islamic higher education. On a practical level, the findings highlight the critical importance of strong leadership, a participatory culture, and continuous training to ensure the

successful implementation of ISO 21001:2018.

However, this study has some limitations, including its focus on a single institution and the use of a qualitative approach, which may restrict the generalizability of its findings to other institutions. Additionally, the study did not explore the financial and policy implications of implementing ISO 21001:2018. Future research should consider conducting comparative studies between certified and non-certified Islamic universities, examining the long-term sustainability of ISO 21001:2018, and investigating how digital transformation and leadership styles impact implementation outcomes. Such research will further enhance the understanding of ISO-based quality assurance systems within religious-based academic environments.

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