Exploring Commitment to Quality Improvement in State Islamic Senior High Schools: Insights from Aceh

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Abstract:

This study aims to analyze and understand the practice of commitment to improving educational quality in several State Islamic Senior High Schools (Madrasah Aliyah) in Aceh. Using a qualitative, multisite Design, this study examines variations in the implementation of quality assurance across three madrasas with different institutional characteristics. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The results indicate that madrasah principals' commitment is expressed through systematic approaches, relational strategies, and culture-based leadership. Furthermore, quality assurance strategies vary from formal, data-driven systems to flexible, value-based approaches, while stakeholder engagement ranges from structured participation to informal, trust-based collaboration. The implications of this study underscore the importance of tailoring quality improvement strategies to each madrasah's specific context. This research demonstrates that adequate quality assurance requires leadership commitment, tailored strategies, and active stakeholder involvement, all of which contribute to the sustainability of educational improvement. This research provides policymakers and educational leaders with valuable insights for improving the quality of education in madrasahs.

Keywords: *Quality Assurance, Commitment, Stakeholder Engagement*

Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan memahami praktik komitmen peningkatan mutu pendidikan pada beberapa Madrasah Aliyah Negeri di Aceh. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain multisite, penelitian ini mengkaji variasi dalam implementasi penjaminan mutu di tiga madrasah dengan karakteristik kelembagaan yang berbeda. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data ini dilakukan melalui reduksi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komitmen kepala madrasah diekspresikan melalui pendekatan sistematis, strategi relasional, dan kepemimpinan berbasis budaya. Selain itu, strategi penjaminan mutu bervariasi, mulai dari sistem berbasis data formal hingga pendekatan fleksibel berbasis nilai, sementara keterlibatan stakeholder mencakup partisipasi terstruktur hingga kolaborasi berbasis kepercayaan yang informal. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya penyesuaian strategi peningkatan mutu dengan konteks spesifik masing-masing madrasah. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penjaminan mutu yang efektif memerlukan komitmen kepemimpinan, strategi yang disesuaikan, dan keterlibatan aktif pemangku kepentingan, yang semuanya berkontribusi pada keberlanjutan peningkatan pendidikan. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan berharga bagi pembuat

kebijakan dan pemimpin pendidikan dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan di madrasah.

Kata Kunci: *Penjaminan Mutu, Komitmen, Keterlibatan Stakeholder*

INTRODUCTION

Improving the quality of education is a crucial issue for the advancement of any nation, including Indonesia (Rodliyah et al., 2024; Zamroni et al., 2025). In the Indonesian context, quality assurance in education is necessary to achieve the national goals outlined in the 1945 Constitution, which aims to enlighten the nation (Ibad, 2024; Indana et al., 2024; Rambe et al., 2025). Improving educational quality is a priority, especially as technological challenges become increasingly complex (Alenezi et al., 2023; Petrychenko et al., 2023). Quality education not only impacts individuals but also contributes to social, economic, and cultural development (Shavkidinova et al., 2023; Spada et al., 2024). Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN), as an educational institution that integrates both religious and general education, plays a vital role in shaping the character and intellectual abilities of future generations. Therefore, research on quality assurance practices in MAN schools in Aceh Tengah is both relevant and necessary to identify the challenges and opportunities for improving education quality in this region.

Although the government's policies on quality assurance in education are clearly outlined, many madrasahs, including those in Aceh Tengah, still face difficulties in translating these policies into effective practices. The main issue is the gap between policy and its implementation in the field. Not all madrasahs have the same capacity to implement these policies, whether in terms of human resources, facilities, or their understanding of quality assurance. This creates a mismatch between expectations and reality, affecting the quality of education provided to students. Therefore, it is essential to conduct in-depth research to identify the factors influencing the implementation of quality assurance in madrasah, so that appropriate solutions can be found.

In the field, the phenomenon shows significant variations in the implementation of quality assurance across madrasahs. Some madrasahs have demonstrated a strong commitment to quality assurance by developing internal policies and involving all stakeholders in the evaluation and improvement process. However, other madrasahs are struggling to implement a structured and effective quality assurance system due to limited resources and a lack of community support. For instance, in MAN 1, quality assurance is implemented with a data-driven approach and active participation from the entire school community. At the same time, in MAN 2 and MAN 3, its implementation is less optimal due to limited resources and insufficient community engagement. This phenomenon shows that the implementation of quality assurance in madrasahs is highly influenced by local context and the specific conditions of each institution.

Previous research has extensively discussed quality assurance in education in Indonesia, including in madrasahs (Kurniawan et al., 2024;

Mohzana et al., 2024; Rambe et al., 2025). Quality assurance is a process that ensures education complies with established standards and produces optimal learning outcomes (Amaral & Norcini, 2023; Ismail et al., 2023; Kayyali, 2023). Additionally, research by Alhamad (2023) and Garcia & Jamias (2023) highlights the importance of commitment from all stakeholders for the success of quality assurance. However, despite numerous studies addressing quality assurance, there is still a gap in research that connects local factors such as culture, religious values, and community involvement with the effectiveness of quality assurance practices. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring the implementation of quality assurance in madrasahs in Aceh Tengah, identifying the factors influencing its effectiveness.

This study offers novelty by integrating local factors that significantly affect quality assurance in madrasahs, such as Aceh Tengah's culture, religious values, and community involvement in education. Previously, many studies focused more on academic aspects and general policies, but few have explored the impact of local factors on the success of quality assurance in madrasah. This study also adopts a multisite approach by comparing three madrasahs in Aceh Tengah, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the differences and similarities in the implementation of quality assurance across various institutional contexts. Thus, this research contributes significantly to the development of a more flexible and context-sensitive quality assurance model.

The research problem addresses how quality assurance practices are implemented in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) schools in Aceh Tengah and what factors influence the effectiveness of implementing quality assurance policies in the field. Preliminary findings suggest that factors such as stakeholder commitment, resource limitations, and community support significantly affect the success of quality assurance. Therefore, it is essential to formulate strategies that can strengthen institutional commitment and involve the community in supporting quality assurance in education. This study aims to provide practical recommendations for other madrasahs seeking to improve educational quality through effective quality assurance practices.

This research contributes to the broader discourse on quality assurance in education in Indonesia, particularly in madrasah. By identifying best practices in quality assurance across three madrasah in Aceh Tengah, this study offers a model that can be adapted by other madrasah in different regions. Additionally, this research highlights the importance of a contextual approach that emphasizes institutional commitment and stakeholder involvement for the success of quality assurance. Therefore, this study provides significant contributions to the development of quality assurance policies and practices in madrasah, ultimately enhancing the overall quality of education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative (Bunger et al., 2024; Garcia & Jamias, 2023), multisite design to explore and understand commitment to quality improvement in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) schools in Aceh Tengah. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand meaning and behavior in their

natural context. At the same time, the multisite design enables comparisons of practices across locations, yielding broader, transferable findings. This design was chosen to identify and understand variations in the implementation of commitment to quality improvement across three madrasahs with different institutional characteristics but a shared mission to enhance educational quality.

The study was conducted in three locations: MAN 1, MAN 2, and MAN 3 in Aceh Tengah, selected for their differing institutional characteristics and local conditions, despite having the same educational improvement goals. Each location faces unique challenges and dynamics in implementing quality assurance, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies and practices applied. The observation sites in this study include the principal's office, classrooms, teacher's room, mosque/mushola, laboratory, and auditorium, which are considered key areas supporting the process of quality education improvement.

Data for this study were collected using three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation (Chand, 2025; Opara et al., 2023). Observation was used to examine the situation and behavior directly within the school environment. Structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with principals, vice principals, teachers, educational staff, and students to gain in-depth information about the implementation of quality assurance strategies. Documentation was used to collect supporting evidence, including school documents, program reports, and relevant administrative archives. Triangulation techniques were applied to ensure data validity by combining information from multiple sources and methods.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman model, which involves three stages (Salmona & Kaczynski, 2024): data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved filtering and focusing on relevant information, while data display organized it into understandable, structured formats. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn through repeated verification processes to ensure that the findings were consistent and reliable. Each school was analyzed individually, followed by cross-site analysis to identify similarities and differences in the implementation of commitment to quality improvement. An inductive approach was used to integrate data into coherent thematic categories reflecting the unique context of each madrasah.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

Practices for improving educational quality in State Islamic Senior High Schools (MAN) encompass policies, strategies, and stakeholder collaboration to achieve higher educational standards. Below are some practices frequently implemented at MAN in efforts to improve educational quality:

Madrasah Principal Commitment

The madrasah principal's commitment to quality assurance on the ground refers to the sincerity and effort the principal makes to ensure that the quality of education provided meets established standards. This commitment can be expressed through various approaches, including data-driven quality

management, adaptive strategies involving communication and interpersonal relationships, and a moral-spiritual foundation that integrates religious values and character. The madrasah principal's commitment is a crucial driver of quality assurance at each madrasah. However, its expression can vary depending on leadership capacity, resources, and the local context of each institution.

Interviews with the madrasah principal at MAN 1 revealed that commitment to quality assurance is manifested through a clear, well-defined vision. The principal of MAN 1 explained that they have a measurable strategic plan and a structured annual program to achieve educational quality standards. "We regularly hold meetings with teachers and students, and use documentation tools for quality monitoring. This ensures that we can clearly monitor progress," said the principal. Researchers interpreted this data as indicating that the principals at MAN 1 implement their commitments systematically and with a planned approach, utilizing supportive infrastructure and a strong work culture to achieve higher-quality assurance goals.

Conversely, the principal of MAN 2 stated that despite resource and geographic limitations, the principals maintain a strong commitment to educational quality. "We rely more on open communication and personal relationships with teachers and students. Sometimes, we undertake small initiatives based on daily needs," said the principal. This finding demonstrates a more adaptive and relational approach, with the principals at MAN 2 opting to utilize informal communication and teacher collaboration to maintain quality assurance momentum, even without strong documentation support.

Researchers found that the madrasah principal's commitment is manifested through cultural-spiritual leadership. The madrasah principal serves as a moral role model, emphasizing discipline and character education while fostering a family-like climate within the madrasah. These observations indicate that although formal quality assurance documentation at MAN 3 is still developing, the madrasah principal has successfully instilled quality values in daily routines. This indicates that the commitment at MAN 3 prioritizes spiritual and social values and positions leadership as a role model in implementing educational quality assurance.

Madrasah principals' commitment to quality assurance varies significantly across madrasahs. MAN 1 stands out for its systematic approach, driven by strategic planning and the use of documented monitoring tools. MAN 2 relies more on open communication and personal relationships to maintain educational quality despite limited resources. Meanwhile, at MAN 3, commitment to educational quality is strongly influenced by cultural and spiritual values, with the madrasah principal acting as a role model in implementing these values in daily life.

The data obtained reveals a clear pattern of differences in the expressions of madrasah principals' commitment to quality assurance across the three madrasahs. MAN 1 demonstrated commitment through a systematic, structured approach; MAN 2 prioritized adaptation and interpersonal relationships to maintain educational quality, while MAN 3 focused more on spiritual and social values. Although the approaches varied, all madrasah principals shared a

common goal: to maintain and improve the quality of education in their institutions while adapting to their respective conditions and contexts.

Quality Assurance Strategies

Educational quality assurance strategies in madrasahs were implemented using a variety of approaches, both systematic and flexible. The systematic approach involved documentation, supervision, and routine training, while the flexible strategy emphasized communication, deliberation, and the application of religious values in school life. All these strategies shared the same goal: to ensure the sustainability of educational quality that was relevant to students' and the community's needs. These variations in strategy reflected the principals' leadership styles, human resource preparedness, existing infrastructure, and the local culture that shaped each madrasah. Thus, each madrasah adapts its quality assurance strategy according to its existing local capacity and context.

Table 1. Ideal Impact of Quality Assurance Strategy

Informant	Interview	Indicators
Principal of MAN 1	"We implement a data-driven strategy, with a clear strategic plan and measurable indicators, such as learning outcomes and attendance."	Data-based and documentation-based strategies, learning and attendance indicators
Principal of MAN 2	"In our school, we rely primarily on collegial forums and reflective discussions to improve quality, although we recognize the need for external scaffolding to strengthen QA procedures."	Pragmatic and phased strategies, reflective discussions, collegial forums
Principal of MAN 3	"Our strategy focuses on religious values and character building. We create a positive learning climate through religious routines and teacher role models."	Culture-based and religious values-based strategies, character building

Interviews with the principal of MAN 1 revealed that the strategies implemented at this school are more systematic and structured, with an emphasis on clear documentation and measurement. The principal stated that they have a strategic plan aligned with the school's vision and mission, as well as indicators derived from student learning outcomes and attendance. Researchers interpret this as an effort to maintain a more measurable, data-driven quality of education, supporting continuous improvement through teacher development and a structured improvement cycle.

The principal of MAN 2 said that this school prioritizes a more pragmatic, gradual approach, focusing on strengthening teacher collaboration through collegial forums and reflective discussions. The principal acknowledged that, despite relying less on formal documentation, these forums have significantly contributed to the school's progress. Researchers interpret this as a more adaptive, relational strategy that prioritizes communication and collaboration among teachers to ensure sustainable educational quality.

At MAN 3, the principal places greater emphasis on religious values and character-building as key strategies for quality assurance. Although formal QA instruments remain limited, observations indicate that daily religious routines

and teacher role models foster a favorable learning climate and support student motivation. Researchers interpret this approach as a strategy based more on culture and moral values, which supports discipline, ownership, and motivation to learn.

Field observations indicate that local characteristics and each madrasah's capacity strongly influence the quality assurance strategy within each madrasah. In MAN 1, clear documentation and measurement allow for more effective monitoring of educational progress. In MAN 2, despite limited documentation, a more flexible and collaborative approach has demonstrated success in gradually improving educational quality. In MAN 3, although formal QA documentation is still developing, religious values and character-building play a key role in fostering a conducive educational climate.

From the data above, it is clear that no single model of quality assurance strategy applies to all madrasahs. MAN 1 emphasizes a systematic and data-driven approach, while MAN 2 prefers an adaptive approach that relies more on collaboration and reflective discussion. On the other hand, MAN 3 emphasizes culture and religious values as the primary foundation for building educational quality. All of these strategies reflect each school's ability to adapt to existing conditions and capacities, and demonstrate that adequate quality assurance depends on the context and resources available at each madrasah.

Although all schools aim to improve educational quality, the strategies used vary significantly. MAN 1 uses a more structured, data-driven approach; MAN 2 prioritizes collaboration and reflective discussion; and MAN 3 focuses more on religious and cultural values. This pattern shows that quality assurance strategies must be tailored to each school's context and capacities, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach.

Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder involvement, including teachers, students, and the community, is a crucial element in the success of educational quality assurance in madrasas. This involvement can take the form of formal participation, such as through forums and organizations, as well as informal participation focused on social relations and religious traditions. Both types of participation play a crucial role in building a sustainable culture of quality. In the field, stakeholder involvement can range from structured, formal participation to more flexible, values-based collaboration, all of which strengthen a sense of shared ownership of educational quality in madrasas.

The principal of MAN 1 stated that the school has institutionalized participation through teacher teams, student forums, and active committees. The principal explained, "We have a dedicated team that collaborates with students and teachers to ensure quality assurance runs smoothly. We also regularly conduct surveys, meetings, and reports as a form of feedback for joint evaluation." Researchers interpret this as a formal and structured effort that ensures ongoing monitoring and evaluation of educational quality. A continuous feedback system provides space for continuous improvement and development.

At MAN 2, interviews with the principal indicated that they build engagement through more flexible relational channels. The principal stated, "We rely more on weekly dialogue, mentoring, and communication with parents to maintain engagement despite limited resources." The researchers interpreted this finding as an effort based more on interpersonal relationships and informal communication, in which collaboration and participation are built on trust and personal interactions. Despite challenges, this approach enables ongoing, sustainable engagement.
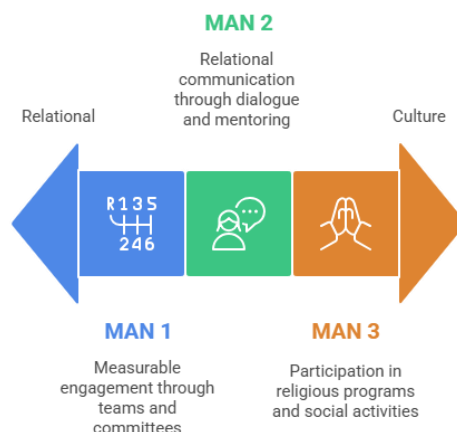
Figure 1. Understanding Student Engagement through Formal, Relational, and Cultural Approaches

Each madrasah implemented a different approach to stakeholder engagement. At MAN 1, participation was more structured, with formal work teams and forums. An organized measurement and feedback system provided space for continuous improvement. At MAN 2, despite limited resources, open communication with parents and flexible mentoring strengthened engagement. At MAN 3, engagement focused more on cultural and religious values, with teachers and students playing a significant role in religious and social activities. Researchers assessed that each approach, while different, shared the same goal: strengthening educational quality by involving stakeholders in various forms tailored to the needs and context of each madrasah.

Based on the above, it is clear that stakeholder engagement is a key aspect of ensuring educational quality in madrasahs. At MAN 1, engagement was systematically structured through teams, forums, and committees, allowing for measurable evaluation and planning. At MAN 2, engagement prioritized relational relationships and informal communication with parents and teachers, despite resource limitations. At MAN 3, engagement was grounded in cultural and spiritual values, with teachers and students actively participating in religious and social activities. All of these approaches support the same goal: building a sustainable culture of quality and improving the quality of education.

The data patterns revealed variations in stakeholder engagement approaches across madrasahs. MAN 1 implemented a more structured approach with formal work teams and forums, while MAN 2 prioritized informal communication and flexible relationships. At MAN 3, engagement focused more on cultural and spiritual values. These approaches demonstrate that there is no

single correct way to engage stakeholders in quality assurance; each madrasah adapts its engagement strategy to its specific circumstances, capacities, and context, while still aiming to strengthen the quality of education.

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into quality improvement practices in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN), illustrating the diverse approaches school leaders use to enhance educational quality. The commitment of school leaders, the strategies for quality assurance, and the involvement of stakeholders in each MAN vary and are influenced by resource capacity, local context, and organizational culture. These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the importance of leadership commitment and the ability to adapt strategies to the existing conditions for successful quality assurance. As noted by Ongesa et al. (2025) and Vettriselvan et al. (2025), effective quality management requires a flexible, responsive approach that involves all relevant stakeholders. This is evident in this study, where MAN 1 adopts a more systematic, data-driven approach, while MAN 2 prioritizes relational communication, and MAN 3 focuses on cultural and spiritual values.

However, there are notable differences between this study's findings and some existing literature. For instance, in previous research by Faqihi & Miah (2023) and Javed & Alenezi (2023), quality assurance strategies primarily focused on formalities and documentation as the primary foundation. In contrast, this study shows that while MAN 1 implements a data-based, systematic approach, in MAN 2 and MAN 3, approaches based on interpersonal relationships and cultural values have proven to be more relevant and practical in their respective contexts. This demonstrates that quality assurance strategies in education cannot be standardized across all schools but must be adapted to each institution's social, cultural, and resource contexts, as discussed by Fomba et al. (2023) and Kyriakides & Panayiotou (2023) in his research on the dynamics of educational quality in schools.

The theoretical implication of this study is the need to develop a more contextual and flexible theory of quality assurance that can be applied across various types of madrasah, taking into account local conditions and each institution's capacity. This study also reinforces the view that adaptive, values-based leadership in madrasah plays a crucial role in creating a sustainable quality culture. For example, the school leader's commitment in MAN 3, which emphasizes spiritual and social values, can still foster a favorable educational climate and support quality improvement, even without strong formal documentation. This supports Fomba et al. (2023) and Kyriakides & Panayiotou (2023) concept that moral and spiritual values in education directly impact the quality of education.

From a practical perspective, the findings provide guidelines for educational leaders, especially school principals, to be more flexible in implementing quality assurance strategies tailored to their schools' conditions. School leaders should identify their madrasah's specific needs and choose the most appropriate approach, whether it is data-driven, relational, or culture-

based. Furthermore, the involvement of all stakeholders—teachers, students, and the community—in the quality assurance process is essential. Active participation from all parties, both formal through forums and committees and informal through social relationships and religious traditions, has proven highly effective in building a sustainable quality culture.

Overall, this study demonstrates that while each madrasah employs different approaches to quality assurance, the ultimate goal remains the same: to improve the quality of education. Therefore, each madrasah must adapt the strategies it implements to its social, cultural, and institutional contexts. In the long term, these more contextual and adaptive approaches can help create an education system that is more effective, inclusive, and sustainable, meeting the needs of students and society as a whole.

CONCLUSION

The key finding of this study is that the success of quality assurance in education at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) is strongly influenced by the commitment of the school leadership, the quality assurance strategies implemented, and the active involvement of all stakeholders, both formal and informal. Each madrasah applies approaches suited to its capacity, social and cultural context, and available resources. In MAN 1, a systematic, data-driven approach has proven effective, whereas in MAN 2, a relational, flexible approach is better suited to their circumstances. MAN 3, with its focus on cultural and spiritual values, also demonstrates that quality assurance can succeed even without strong formal documentation. The main lesson learned from this research is the importance of adapting quality assurance strategies to local conditions and deeply understanding the needs of each madrasah.

The strength of this study lies in its contribution to the development of theory and practice in quality assurance in education, particularly in madrasahs. This research enriches the discourse on the importance of adaptive leadership, grounded in social and cultural contexts, for creating a sustainable quality culture. However, the limitations of this study include its scope, which is limited to only three madrasahs in Aceh Tengah, meaning the findings may not fully represent all madrasahs across Indonesia. For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope to include more madrasahs from diverse regions with different cultural and resource contexts to deepen understanding of effective quality assurance strategies in broader contexts.

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