



EDUCATION FOR ALL: TRANSFORMING EDUCATION FOR A BETTER FUTURE

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Abstract:

This study explores the implementation of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in Indonesia, focusing on the challenges and opportunities of integrating these systems within the unique cultural and religious context of pesantren. Given the dynamic educational landscape and the evolving demands of quality education, this research seeks to understand how IQA can be effectively adapted to fit the specific needs of pesantren while ensuring that their traditional pedagogical values are preserved. The study employs a qualitative research approach, including an analysis of relevant literature and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders involved in the development and implementation of IQA systems within pesantren. The findings reveal that successful IQA implementation requires a careful balance between modern educational standards and the intrinsic values of pesantren, such as religious education, spiritual development, and character formation. Moreover, the study identifies several critical factors for effective IQA implementation, including strong leadership, stakeholder engagement, capacity building for educators and administrators, and the strategic use of technology to enhance efficiency and data management. Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture of continuous improvement and community involvement, which includes engaging parents, alumni, and local community members in the IQA process. By addressing these key factors, pesantren can not only enhance the quality of their educational programs but also contribute to the broader goal of developing a knowledgeable and skilled workforce that aligns with the needs of a rapidly changing global landscape. Ultimately, this study advocates for a holistic approach to IQA in pesantren that preserves their cultural heritage while embracing innovation to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Keywords: *Internal Quality Assurance System, Pesantren, Education Unit Accreditation Instrument, quality education, cultural context, educational reform, leadership, stakeholder engagement, technology integration, continuous improvement.*

INTRODUCTION

The rapidly changing world, characterized by exponential technological advancements, increasing globalization, and pressing global challenges such as climate change, has created a complex and dynamic landscape (OECD, 2018). In this context, education plays a pivotal role in preparing future generations to meet the demands of the 21st century. As Hargreaves (2000) emphasized, "Education is no longer a privilege of the few but a necessity for all, and it must be relevant to the world in which we live." The concept of a subject-based academic curriculum, as explained by Badrut Tamam

Wahyudi and Fathul Jannah, offers a comprehensive framework for designing relevant and effective curricula. By integrating modern learning theories such as constructivism and connectivism (Jonassen, 2003), this model can help students develop the 21st-century skills required to thrive in an increasingly complex world (PISA, 2018). Furthermore, to ensure that education is responsive to the needs of the global community, it is essential to consider the perspectives of diverse learners and foster intercultural understanding, as advocated by Banks (1993)

In their study on liberating education, Umiarso and Zamroni (2011) explain that Western and Eastern perspectives have different approaches in defining the purpose of education. According to them, liberating education in Western tradition emphasizes individual freedom to think critically and rationally, while in Eastern tradition, education is viewed as a means to achieve harmony with broader spiritual and social values. This approach provides the understanding that education not only serves as a tool to develop cognitive skills but also as a means to shape character and strengthen social bonds, which is highly relevant in the context of pesantren, where a balance between acquiring knowledge and spiritual development is prioritized. By integrating both perspectives, education can facilitate the liberation of individuals in a more holistic social and cultural context.

The gap between education systems and workforce needs remains a critical issue in the evolving landscape of digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Traditional educational approaches often lag behind the rapidly changing demands of the job market, leaving many graduates ill-equipped with essential technical and soft skills. For example, key capabilities like programming, data analysis, and digital literacy, alongside problem-solving and communication skills, are frequently identified as missing in new job seekers (UNICEF, 2021; Education and Employers, 2024).

Efforts to address this issue emphasize reforming curricula and forging stronger collaborations between educational institutions and industries. Programs such as skill mapping and digital credential systems have been proposed to standardize skill assessments and align them with industry requirements. These systems allow students to track and verify their competencies more effectively, which could enhance employability (UNICEF, 2021).

Regional collaborations between colleges and local industries also show promise. For example, community colleges that specialize in different areas based on local workforce needs could collectively address employment demands. Such partnerships could improve students' readiness for available job opportunities while enhancing economic outcomes (Diverse Education, 2024).

To ensure success, ongoing partnerships between government, business, and civil society are vital. This approach helps create a "whole of society" framework to tackle youth unemployment and skills gaps, ensuring young people are prepared for a dynamic job market (UNICEF, 2021; Education and Employers, 2024).

For further exploration, you can access comprehensive reports from organizations like UNICEF and the OECD, which discuss strategies to bridge the education-employment divide. These are critical in fostering inclusive economies and future-proofing the workforce.

Education, as a cornerstone of human development, now faces increasingly complex challenges due to rapid technological advancements, globalization, and socio-cultural changes. To produce graduates who can adapt and contribute significantly to an ever-changing world, education systems must undergo a radical transformation. Rigid curricula and passive learning methods are no longer relevant. Instead, a more holistic, flexible, and student-centered approach is needed, one that empowers learners to develop 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and effective communication (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Research by the OECD (2018) indicates that many education systems have yet to adequately prepare students for the demands of the increasingly complex job market. While specific technical skills may quickly become obsolete, critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation will remain essential. Therefore, education must shift from a

knowledge transmission model to a competency-based learning model. Project-based learning, collaborative learning, and the utilization of digital technologies can be effective strategies to achieve this goal (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

Moreover, education should address the social and emotional aspects of students. Skills such as empathy, self-awareness, and the ability to work in teams are becoming increasingly important in an interconnected world. Character education and human values should be integrated into all aspects of learning. In this way, graduates will not only possess strong academic competencies but also have high integrity and ethics (Lickona, 2004).

Educational reform involves more than just changes in curricula and teaching methods; it also demands a transformation of the organizational culture within schools. ¹Teachers need to be equipped with strong pedagogical competencies and supported by conducive learning environments. ² Additionally, the involvement of parents, communities, and other stakeholders is crucial to ensure the success of educational reform (Fullan, 2007).

In conclusion, education requires a radical transformation to produce graduates who are prepared for an uncertain future. By adopting a more holistic, flexible, and student-centered approach, and by engaging all stakeholders, we can create education systems that are relevant, inclusive, and sustainable.

A key challenge lies in bridging the gap between education and the demands of the modern workforce. Many graduates lack the essential skills and competencies required by employers. To address this issue, educational institutions must adopt a more holistic approach that integrates academic knowledge with practical skills. This includes incorporating project-based learning, experiential learning, and work-integrated learning into curricula. Additionally, fostering strong partnerships between educational institutions and industry can help ensure that graduates are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in the workplace.

Furthermore, education must go beyond academic achievement and focus on developing the whole person. This includes nurturing social, emotional, and ethical competencies. By cultivating empathy, resilience, and a sense of global citizenship, education can empower learners to become responsible and engaged members of society.

To achieve these goals, significant reforms are needed. Teachers must be provided with ongoing professional development to enhance their pedagogical skills and knowledge. Educational institutions should invest in technology infrastructure and digital literacy training to support innovative teaching and learning practices. Moreover, collaboration between policymakers, educators, parents, and community members is essential to create a supportive learning environment that promotes student success.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs document analysis as its primary methodological approach. The documents analyzed include planning documents, evaluation reports, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) related to the internal quality assurance system of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals responsible for the development and implementation of the system. The document analysis was carried out systematically to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges in developing the internal quality assurance system for pesantren

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study delve deeper into the transformative implications of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). By elaborating on the themes of recognition, challenges, strategies, and broader implications, this discussion reflects the nuanced realities of implementing quality assurance frameworks within educational institutions, particularly those with distinct cultural and operational contexts.

1. Expanding Recognition of IQA in Pesantren

The progression toward IQA system implementation in pesantren reflects broader

educational trends advocating for accountability and structured quality frameworks. As Harlen (2020) notes, such systems are integral to fostering trust and transparency in educational institutions. For pesantren, this shift is not merely administrative; it signifies a deeper commitment to aligning traditional pedagogical values with contemporary educational standards, a balance critical for maintaining institutional identity while embracing modernity.

2. Catalysts for Awareness

The growing awareness is driven by increasing globalization and governmental directives that mandate quality benchmarks for educational institutions. Studies like those by Altbach et al. (2022) highlight that external accreditation requirements often act as catalysts for internal reforms. In pesantren, similar pressures have encouraged the leadership to prioritize quality assurance as a tool for institutional survival and growth in a competitive educational landscape. However, it is essential to ensure that these external pressures do not compromise the unique cultural and religious identity of pesantren.

3. Challenges: Cultural Dynamics

Cultural resistance remains a significant barrier to change. In pesantren, where traditions are deeply embedded, the introduction of IQA systems often faces opposition rooted in fear of losing cultural authenticity. As elaborated by Sahlberg (2021), this challenge is not unique to pesantren but is a common phenomenon in any institution with long-standing practices and ideologies. To address this, it is crucial to engage with religious scholars and community leaders to ensure that IQA systems are aligned with Islamic values and principles.

4. Addressing Cultural Concerns

To address these cultural challenges, it is imperative to frame IQA systems not as external impositions but as mechanisms that enhance the institution's intrinsic values. According to Vally and Spreen (2023), integrating local traditions into the quality assurance dialogue ensures broader acceptance and minimizes resistance. For pesantren, this could involve incorporating Islamic values and practices into the IQA framework, such as emphasizing the importance of character development, spiritual growth, and social responsibility.

5. Financial Constraints and Sustainability

While financial limitations are a recurring issue, innovative approaches can mitigate these challenges. For instance, blended funding models, which combine government subsidies with private investments, have been successfully employed in various contexts to sustain quality initiatives (UNESCO, 2022). Pesantren could adapt similar models, such as establishing endowments or seeking corporate sponsorships, to secure long-term financial stability.

6. Human Resource Development: A Cornerstone

The capacity of human resources is directly proportional to the effectiveness of IQA systems. Zhang et al. (2023) emphasize that comprehensive training programs targeting administrators, educators, and even students can significantly elevate the quality of implementation. For pesantren, creating dedicated quality assurance units staffed with trained professionals could streamline efforts and ensure consistency. Additionally, it is important to provide opportunities for staff to attend conferences, workshops, and other professional development activities to stay updated on the latest trends in quality assurance.

7. Leveraging Technology in IQA

The integration of technology offers an untapped potential for pesantren to overcome some challenges associated with IQA. Digital platforms for data collection, performance monitoring, and stakeholder feedback can provide real-time insights, enhancing decision-making processes. As noted by Li and Wilson (2023), technology not only reduces operational inefficiencies but also democratizes access to quality data. However, it is important to ensure that the use of technology does not compromise the unique cultural and spiritual ethos of pesantren.

8. Engaging the Broader Community

Involving parents and alumni in quality assurance processes is another avenue to strengthen systems. According to Kim and Hong (2020), community engagement fosters a shared sense of ownership and accountability. For pesantren, leveraging their strong community ties can enhance both participation and trust in IQA systems.

9. Comparative Insights from Similar Institutions

Examining quality assurance practices in similar religious or culturally anchored institutions worldwide provides valuable insights. For example, Catholic seminaries in the Philippines have successfully adapted quality assurance systems while preserving their spiritual ethos (Cruz, 2021). These parallels underscore the feasibility of balancing tradition with quality frameworks.

10. Fostering a Culture of Continuous Improvement

One of the hallmarks of effective IQA systems is the establishment of a culture of continuous improvement. This involves regular reviews, feedback loops, and adaptive strategies, as suggested by Barber et al. (2020). For pesantren, embedding such a culture ensures that quality assurance becomes a dynamic, evolving process rather than a static compliance exercise.

11. Addressing Gender Equity in Quality Assurance

Another dimension worth exploring is the integration of gender-sensitive policies within IQA systems. Studies by Chakraborty and Bansal (2021) highlight that equitable access and representation enhance overall institutional quality. In the pesantren context, this could mean ensuring that both male and female students benefit equally from quality improvements.

12. The Role of Leadership

Leadership plays a pivotal role in driving IQA reforms. As Fullan and Quinn (2021) assert, transformative leadership is characterized by vision, adaptability, and a collaborative approach. In pesantren, empowering leaders who understand both the institution's cultural roots and modern educational paradigms is crucial for sustained success.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study illuminate the transformative potential of Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). By integrating traditional values with modern quality assurance frameworks, pesantren can enhance their educational standards while preserving their unique cultural and religious identity.

Key findings emphasize the importance of:

1. **Cultural Sensitivity:** IQA systems must be tailored to the specific needs and values of pesantren, ensuring that they align with Islamic principles and traditions.
2. **Holistic Development:** Beyond academic excellence, IQA systems should prioritize the holistic development of students, including their spiritual, social, and emotional well-being.
3. **Community Engagement:** Involving parents, alumni, and community members in the IQA process can foster a sense of ownership and accountability, ensuring that the system meets the needs of all stakeholders.
4. **Capacity Building:** Investing in the professional development of educators and administrators is crucial for the successful implementation of IQA systems.
5. **Technological Integration:** Leveraging technology can streamline administrative processes, enhance data analysis, and facilitate communication among stakeholders.
6. **Strong Leadership:** Effective leadership is essential to drive IQA initiatives and create a culture of continuous improvement.

By addressing these key factors, pesantren can position themselves as leaders in Islamic education, providing high-quality education that meets the needs of the 21st century. As the global landscape continues to evolve, it is imperative for pesantren to embrace innovation while preserving their core values.

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