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From Compliance to Culture: PPEPP-Based Quality Control in Islamic State Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *This study examines the shift of quality control from procedural compliance to a quality culture through the PPEPP cycle in Indonesian Islamic state higher education (PTKIN), using IAIN Kerinci as a case.* ***Method:*** *A qualitative case-study design traces quality as everyday practice rather than documentation. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with senior leaders, the internal quality assurance institute (LPM), faculty/program quality units, lecturers, and students; observations of academic and administrative services and quality meetings; and document analysis of SPMI standards, internal audit (AMI) reports, management review (RTM) minutes, and follow-up plans. Analysis applied iterative data condensation, display, and verification.* ***Results:*** *The findings show that PPEPP, AMI, and RTM function to close the loop by translating evaluation results into corrective decisions and monitored follow-up. However, implementation consistency varies across units due to uneven quality literacy, reliance on key individuals, and incomplete digital integration.* ***Novelty:*** *The study recommends risk-based auditing, an integrated quality-data dashboard, and structured student–alumni engagement to strengthen accountability and accreditation outcomes.*

INTRODUCTION

Global higher education dynamics are increasingly shifting toward evidence-based governance. Expanding access, intensifying reputational competition, and growing demands for public accountability mean that quality is no longer sufficient as a proclaimed attribute; it must be demonstrable through consistent improvement cycles [1]. This changing landscape has led many institutions to strengthen internal quality assurance so that the quality of learning and services does not depend merely on the momentum of accreditation exercises [2].

Within contemporary frameworks, quality assurance is understood as an "organizational learning mechanism" that sets standards, tests their implementation, and iteratively improves practice, thereby making quality a daily routine rather than an annual project [3]. This orientation aligns with the idea of continuous improvement, which positions quality cycles as the institutional learning engine for sustaining relevance, effectiveness, and long-term viability [3].

However, the shift from compliance to culture does not occur automatically. Many universities succeed in "document compliance" but not in "behavioral compliance," leaving standards to function as administrative files rather than living practices [2]. At this point, the core quality problem is not merely a lack of instruments, but weak internalization of quality values and routines within implementing units [4].

The concept of a quality culture emphasizes that quality grows when values, commitment, and everyday practices converge within a system that enables people to work consistently according to shared standards [4]. Consequently, a quality culture is not adequately assessed by the mere existence of standards, but by the extent to which standards become "work habits" that are understood, accepted, and enacted across organizational levels [4].

In the Indonesian context, higher education quality assurance is normatively framed through the cycle of setting, implementing, evaluating, controlling, and improving standards as a systemic operational pathway [5]. This framework establishes that quality control is not an auxiliary activity, but a core element of the cycle that ensures standards genuinely operate within academic and non-academic processes [5].

As a system, PPEPP is often associated with the PDCA logic that requires consistency across planning, implementation, checking, and corrective action [3]. Integrating PDCA into campus practice provides a managerial language that is readily understood, helping to bridge quality standards with the day-to-day routines of units [6].

Nevertheless, much of the literature on Indonesia's SPMI still tends to read PPEPP primarily as a "format" or "documentary flow," rather than as a control mechanism that gradually shapes organizational behavior [7]. As a result, discussions of quality control often stop at procedural compliance, while the question of how control mechanisms shift work routines into a stable quality culture remains insufficiently addressed [7].

On the other hand, studies on the effectiveness of quality assurance indicate that quality managers' perceptions of whether QA is "useful" are strongly influenced by leadership support, clarity of objectives, and the integration of QA with decision-making processes [2]. This suggests that effective quality control is not defined by the abundance of instruments, but by the strength of the feedback produced and its actual use to correct policies and improve services [2].

In practice, Internal Quality Audit (AMI) documents and their follow-up processes often serve as a "meeting point" between findings data and improvement decisions, positioning quality control as a driver of change. In AMI reports, audit findings are explicitly treated as the basis for quality enhancement policies at both program and unit levels, affirming the control function as the link between evaluation and improvement [8].

The PTKIN context introduces additional complexity because these institutions carry both academic and value-based mandates. Accordingly, quality must be interpreted not only as technical performance, but also as alignment of purposes, service ethos, and governance integrity [9]. This complexity implies that moving from compliance to culture requires quality control designs that are sensitive to organizational structures, actors, and established routines [4].

At the level of external policy, accreditation instrument development emphasizes the need for transitional periods, piloting, and public consultation, indicating that external evaluation systems are also evolving toward more adaptive instruments [10].

The implicit message is that sustainable quality depends on internal readiness, not merely on document readiness at the time of assessment [2].

It is at this juncture that the article's research gap is articulated: while many studies of PPEPP discuss the cycle's stages, relatively few unpack quality control as a mechanism for organizational behavior change within PTKIN environments [7]. Even fewer studies map how "control" functions as a bridge from procedural compliance to a stable quality culture across units [4].

Furthermore, the inquiry traces how quality is "done" in the institution: how standards are translated into unit-level practice, how auditing and monitoring operate, how management review meetings generate decisions, and how follow-up actions are supervised until they become routine work habits [8]. This tracing helps to view PPEPP not merely as a sequence, but as an ecology of practice that connects documents, data, actors, and decisions [2].

This article is grounded in two mutually reinforcing foundations. The first is quality culture theory, which conceptualizes quality as the convergence of values, commitment, and practice [4]. The second is PDCA-based continuous improvement theory, which explains how iterative improvement can be institutionalized through consistent control, evaluation, and corrective action [3].

Accordingly, this article aims to explain the shift "from compliance to culture" by reading PPEPP-based quality control as an institutional mechanism that shapes behavior, not merely one that checks documents [2]. Operationally, the article advances an analytic focus on control: how quality findings are translated into decisions, how those decisions are implemented, and how consistency is maintained until it becomes institutional culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to develop an in-depth understanding of how PPEPP-based quality control operates within a specific organizational context [11]. The design is selected because the shift from compliance to culture is a processual phenomenon that requires close tracing of practices, actor interactions, and decision logics in real-world settings [12].

The study is situated at IAIN Kerinci and involves key informants representing institutional leaders, quality assurance managers, academic unit administrators, lecturers, and students [11]. Data collection integrates semi-structured interviews, observations of service processes and quality-related meetings, and document analysis (e.g., SPMI documents, AMI reports, RTM minutes, and follow-up action plans) to capture quality as enacted practice rather than as text alone [12].

Data analysis follows an iterative logic of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification to enable the findings to trace linkages among evaluation results, control decisions, and changes in practice [13]. Data trustworthiness is strengthened through triangulation of sources and methods, maintenance of an audit

trail, and thematic reading that preserves interpretive traceability—consistent with established principles of trustworthiness in qualitative research [14].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Guided by the study's aim to portray quality control as "work in practice" rather than as documentation alone, the following findings are constructed from a synthesis of leadership and quality-manager interviews, observations of academic and non-academic service processes, and analysis of formal quality assurance documents applied at IAIN Kerinci. The presentation follows a descriptive qualitative logic that emphasizes the linkage between actors' understandings, the mechanisms they enact, and operational evidence observable in everyday institutional routines.

At the leadership level, the meaning of quality control appears broadly aligned, with different emphases reflecting unit mandates. The Rector and the Head of the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM) frame quality control as a governance instrument that steers the tridharma, ensures program measurability, secures standard attainment, and strengthens institutional accountability. Meanwhile, vice-rectors highlight operational levers—academic delivery, budgeting, human resources, and student affairs—as critical points to prevent quality from remaining rhetorical. This convergence of meaning indicates that quality is understood as an institutional necessity rather than an accreditation-driven activity, and it resonates with the obligation of internal quality assurance within Indonesia's SN-Dikti framework.

In terms of mechanisms, quality control operates through a relatively complete structure and set of working instruments. Interviews indicate the presence of the LPM and quality units at faculty and program levels, the use of SPMI documents (policy, manuals, standards, and SOPs), the conduct of Internal Quality Audits (AMI), and Management Review Meetings (RTM) as forums for reflecting on performance and determining follow-up actions. From the documentary evidence, the study identifies a pattern of "documents as working guidance," in which standards and SOPs are not merely archived but actively used as references for auditing, evaluation, and service improvement. This pattern reinforces PPEPP as a recurring control cycle embedded in the institution's internal quality governance.

Field observations further show that PPEPP and the AMI–RTM cycle are indeed enacted, although the consistency and procedural neatness vary across units. Some units demonstrate complete documentation, regular meeting rhythms, and well-mapped follow-up actions, whereas others still rely on manual processes with high dependency on particular personnel. This contributes to uneven reporting, fragmented data consolidation, and variable speed of follow-up implementation. Such variation suggests that system-level coordination is in place, but the maturity of quality culture at the implementing level remains gradual and uneven.

Administrative governance has also been strengthened through digital systems (e.g., staffing/presence applications and administrative service platforms), yet the

current trajectory indicates partial optimization, particularly regarding integration and user literacy. Observational data suggest that digitalization improves accountability and service accessibility, but "usage gaps" persist because some lecturers and staff continue to prefer manual procedures. As a result, delays in reporting and inter-unit data inconsistencies remain possible, which in turn limits the timely use of quality data for rapid decision-making. This finding aligns with recent literature emphasizing the strategic value of digital systems for auditability and quality management to ensure efficiency and robust documentation.

Stakeholder participation in quality control shows movement toward more collaborative practices, but it is not yet fully inclusive in formal evaluation stages. Interviews note efforts to involve students, alumni, and external partners as sources of feedback; however, observations of RTM suggest that student and alumni engagement has not become a consistent, structured practice across all units. This limitation matters because the quality of evaluation is strongly shaped by the perspectives of those who directly experience institutional services, and recent QA scholarship increasingly positions student engagement as a strategic component of effective internal quality assurance.

The most salient challenges emerge in two interrelated domains: structural and cultural. Structurally, limitations in the availability of staff with strong technical quality expertise, along with constraints in infrastructure—especially digital integration—reduce the pace and responsiveness of follow-up cycles. Culturally, some resistance to change persists, reinforced by perceptions of quality work as an "administrative burden." At the same time, the findings indicate that leadership responses tend to emphasize capacity-building strategies—training, repeated socialization, and developmental auditing—intended to shift quality from procedural compliance toward internalized work values.

At the level of institutional outcomes, the findings confirm a strong perceived relationship between consistent quality control and accreditation performance. Informants' narratives describe improvements in institutional accreditation status and "excellent" achievements in several study programs as outcomes associated with strengthened internal auditing, routine evaluation, and more disciplined follow-up implementation. This pattern corresponds to the logic of accreditation policy, which increasingly requires evidence of continuous quality assurance cycles, measurable performance, and documented follow-up actions as markers of sound institutional governance.

Discussion

Efforts to understand quality control at IAIN Kerinci converge on a central picture: quality is no longer treated as a "seasonal" activity ahead of accreditation, but is being directed toward becoming a daily work habit that connects documents, data, and action at the unit level [15]. This trajectory aligns with the notion of *quality culture*, which argues that durable quality grows from reflective routines, consistent leadership, and process

ownership by implementers, rather than from administrative compliance alone [15], [16]. In higher education settings, the transition from "filling out forms" to "managing processes" is often an early signal that quality assurance is entering the domain of organizational culture [17].

Findings on the functioning of the PPEPP cycle, alongside the operation of Internal Quality Audits (AMI) and Management Review Meetings (RTM), illustrate how control works as a mechanism for "closing the loop" so that evaluation is converted into improvement [18], [19]. Theoretically, this configuration is appropriate because PDCA places "Check–Act" at the core of organizational learning rather than treating it as a reporting stage [18]. From an external reference point, these practices also resonate with European quality standards that require internal QA to operate systematically, be documented, and be followed through for continuous enhancement [20]. In this sense, field evidence reinforces the literature that institutional quality is most stable when evaluation, corrective decisions, and monitoring of follow-up actions become measurable routines [19], [21].

The finding that leadership articulates a "single narrative" from rectorate level to quality units reflects classic managerial functions: planning provides direction, organizing clarifies roles, implementation mobilizes resources, and supervision safeguards consistency [22], [23]. Total Quality Management (TQM) scholarship emphasizes that alignment among vision, process, and implementers is the key differentiator between change that remains at the policy level and change that becomes embedded in operational practice [24]. When leadership direction is translated into unit priorities—such as learning standards, academic services, human resource strengthening, and budget accountability—quality becomes a repeatable and transferable "way of working" across periods [16], [19].

The observed variation in procedural neatness across work units—some already well-organized and others still largely manual—supports the quality culture explanation that the shift from a document-based system to a practice-based system almost always produces an implementation gap in the early phase, especially when quality literacy and technical capacity are uneven [15], [17]. Accordingly, the most effective strategy is typically not adding more forms, but simplifying evidence requirements, strengthening mentoring, and cultivating unit-level reflective habits through tiered coaching [19]. This finding also echoes contemporary QA recommendations that promote an orientation toward "improvement" rather than "compliance," so audits drive changes in work behavior rather than merely producing complete files [16].

The finding that service digitalization (e.g., academic and staffing information systems) has not been utilized evenly can be interpreted as an issue of capacity and system design rather than individual willingness alone. Digital QA literature indicates that digital quality systems enhance efficiency, transparency, and analytical precision when cross-domain data are integrated and easily accessible [25], [26]. At this point, the idea of a "quality data home" or a quality dashboard becomes relevant because it helps RTM move from a descriptive forum (reading numbers) to a diagnostic forum

(identifying patterns, root causes, and improvement priorities) [25]. In this way, the field evidence strengthens prior arguments that digital QA transformation becomes effective when accompanied by training, standardized data inputs, and usage incentives, so the system does not stall as merely an "application project" [25], [26].

Findings related to strengthening KKNI/OBE-based curricula and efforts to map CPL–RPS–assessment reaffirm the importance of constructive alignment as the core of learning quality. Constructive alignment theory stresses that intended learning outcomes, teaching–learning strategies, and assessment must tightly align so that quality is not merely decorative [27]. This principle also corresponds with QA standards that require study programs to demonstrate systematic linkages among goals, processes, and learning results [20]. Therefore, evidence that some units have begun linking CPL to classroom implementation signals a positive shift from "document format" to "pedagogical coherence" [19], [27].

The finding that student and alumni involvement in evaluation still needs expansion is consistent with stakeholder theory, which positions service users as a source of quality legitimacy and as the closest data source to real-world impact [28]. QA studies suggest that student voice and graduate-user feedback improve the relevance of standards, reduce bias in internal evaluation, and make improvement decisions more acceptable to the academic community [20], [29]. In this context, tracer studies become a logical bridge between internal processes and graduate outcomes because they provide data on job waiting time, field match, and competency needs that can be used to revise CPL and learning strategies [30]. Hence, the finding regarding the need to strengthen tracer systems and "user voice" forums reinforces the principle that the most convincing quality improvement is one that can demonstrate a traceable chain: data → decision → change → impact [30], [31].

Findings on budget constraints and limited human resources clarify that academic quality cannot be separated from resource governance. Higher education governance literature emphasizes that funding gaps often hinder "closing the loop" because follow-up actions from audit results require financial support, time, and implementer capacity [32]. Therefore, evidence that follow-up actions remain stalled in several areas strengthens the recommendation to prioritize improvement using a risk-based approach—giving precedence to standards with high impact on learning, student services, and tridharma outcomes [33]. This pattern is consistent with internal audit research showing that risk-based auditing is more productive in encouraging systemic change than compliance auditing alone [33], [34].

Institutional accreditation gains and "Excellent" (Unggul) achievements in several programs can be understood as consequences of an increasingly coherent system rather than merely the output of documentation work. Accreditation literature argues that modern accreditation instruments tend to assess the consistency of performance logic chains (input–process–output–outcome) and the demonstrated functioning of SPMI and its follow-up actions [10], [20]. From this perspective, "pockets of excellence" are theoretically plausible: units that successfully build orderly PPEPP routines and robust

evidence are more likely to demonstrate stable performance and then have it confirmed through external evaluation [16], [19]. The next challenge is replicating these good practices through a PPEPP playbook and cross-program mentoring so that quality does not remain concentrated in isolated islands of excellence [19], [35].

Within the PTKIN context, findings on aligning quality with the values of *amanah* and *ihsan* enrich the reading of TQM: quality is not only a matter of organizational efficiency, but also a moral responsibility. Islamic education management literature highlights that accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement are more readily accepted when framed as professional trust as well as scholarly ethics [36]. This finding also aligns with studies in Islamic universities suggesting that spiritual values can strengthen buy-in for quality culture because quality is understood as part of institutional integrity and public service [37]. Thus, integrating modern frameworks (PDCA/TQM/OBE) with Islamic values offers an opportunity to consolidate commitment across the academic community—provided that indicators are clear and evidence remains measurable [19], [36].

Overall, the linkage between field findings and prior theory and research indicates that IAIN Kerinci's quality assurance system is in a consolidation phase: core instruments are operating (PPEPP, AMI, RTM), leadership provides direction, yet the equalization of quality literacy and cross-domain data integration remains major work [15], [19]. The strengthening pathway most consistent with scientific evidence is to deepen risk-based auditing, widen student–alumni participation, and accelerate data integration across domains so that quality decisions become increasingly fact-based (Ardianingsih, 2021; Freeman, 1984; OECD, 2020). With these steps, quality is more likely to solidify as an institutional identity rather than a temporary agenda, because the organization learns, stores lessons in systems, and repeats effective practices with consistency [16], [18].

CONCLUSION

The study finds that quality control at IAIN Kerinci is transitioning from accreditation-oriented compliance toward an embedded quality culture, demonstrated by the institutionalization of the PPEPP cycle and the systematic use of AMI and RTM to ensure continuous improvement through effective feedback loops. The results imply that strong leadership alignment and the operational translation of shared institutional goals into routine practices are critical to making quality sustainable, measurable, and transferable, thereby strengthening accountability and improving accreditation and overall performance outcomes. **Limitation:** The study reveals uneven implementation caused by structural and cultural barriers, including disparities across units, limited technical capacity in quality management, incomplete digital integration, and lingering perceptions of quality assurance as merely administrative work. **Future Research :** Future studies should explore strategies such as capacity-building models, integrated digital quality systems, risk-based quality management approaches, and expanded stakeholder engagement (especially students and alumni) to strengthen the long-term institutionalization of quality culture in PTKIN contexts.

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