

Accreditation Policy and Internal Quality Assurance: A Study of Private Islamic Religious Universities in Nusa Tenggara

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System at Private Islamic Religious Universities in the Nusa Tenggara region, specifically focusing on institutions that have not yet attained the minimum required accreditation ratings. Additionally, it seeks to identify the key factors that impede the effectiveness of internal quality assurance initiatives.

Method: This research employs a qualitative field study approach. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving participants from six selected institutions, including university leaders and managers of internal quality assurance units. Data analysis was conducted concurrently, utilizing an interactive model work system. The validity of the data was assessed through credibility tests, which were implemented by extending the research duration, enhancing observation persistence, and employing triangulation methods.

Result: The implementation of the internal quality assurance system is currently inadequate and primarily motivated by accreditation requirements rather than by a commitment to continuous quality improvement. Most institutions are deficient in establishing comprehensive quality assurance frameworks, maintaining proper documentation, and fostering a robust quality culture, which can be attributed to limited resources, inadequate planning, and insufficient understanding among leadership. Consequently, many institutions struggle to meet accreditation standards. To enhance their effectiveness, these institutions must fortify their internal quality assurance systems through consistent planning, leadership commitment, and support from their coordinating bodies for private sector universities to ensure sustainable quality in higher education.

Practical Implications for Economic Growth and Development: This study serves as a valuable reference for the development of a more effective quality management system in university governance, aligned with the National Standards of Higher Education and responsive to the evolving demands of society. By implementing sound governance practices, institutions can ensure the delivery of quality education, ultimately producing competent graduates who are well-equipped to meet the needs of the business and industrial sectors.

Keywords: *Internal Quality Assurance System, Higher Education Standards, Continuous Quality Improvement*

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INTRODUCTION

The role of higher education as an institutional framework for organizing advanced learning is pivotal in the cultivation of human capital for long-term investment, aimed at fostering and educating the nation's populace (Hakim, 2019). In Indonesia, higher education operates under two distinct ownership statuses: public (government-owned) and private (non-government-owned) universities. The provision of higher education by government-owned institutions not only fulfills the constitutional mandate enshrined in law but also aims to prepare high-quality human resources equipped with academic and/or professional competencies capable of applying, developing, and enriching the domains of science, technology, and the arts, thereby contributing to societal and national progress (Junaidah & Ayu, 2019).

According to the Higher Education database, the total number of universities across Indonesia is documented at 4,514, comprising 3,121 university/institute-level institutions, 1,108 colleges/academies, 262 polytechnics, 12 community colleges, and 11 State Universities of Legal Agency. Additionally, the total number of lecturers amounts to 200,175, of whom 10% hold doctoral qualifications. The student population is approximately 7 million, with around 240,000 individuals enrolled in vocational pathways (Sauri et al., 2019).

Currently, the organization of higher education faces significant challenges regarding quality and relevance in the development of academic disciplines, as graduates are increasingly less integrated into the labor market. Concurrently, to ensure the sustainability of higher education institutions amidst globalization and the digitalization era, characterized by intense quality competition, providers of higher education are tasked with the challenge of securing public trust concerning their services and the employability of their graduates (Sauri et al., 2019).

The subpar quality of higher education in Indonesia represents a strategic issue that continues to attract governmental attention. Consequently, various aspects related to the higher education delivery system have undergone transformations, encompassing institutional frameworks, regulatory measures, governance, and strategic orientation. To assess the quality of higher education in Indonesia as a basis for extending operational licenses or dissolving institutions, the government has instituted an accreditation policy for higher education institutions and study programs, which is conducted periodically every five years by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education and independent accreditation entities.

Since 2006, accreditation policies for higher education in Indonesia have been aimed at evaluating compliance with seven standards within the higher education delivery system, which include: 1) vision, mission, goals, and strategic standards; 2) governance, leadership, and quality assurance; 3) student and graduate outcomes; 4) human resources; 5) curriculum, learning, and academic atmosphere; 6) financial resources, facilities, infrastructure, and information systems; and 7) research, community engagement, and collaboration (Nuphus et al., 2019). However, the evolution of these accreditation policies has revealed that the focus on input and process-based evaluations is inadequate, complicating the assessment of compliance with national higher education standards. In light of these deficiencies, the government has adopted a new accreditation policy based on nine criteria, which came into effect on October 1, 2018 (Sauri et al., 2019).

There exist at least three primary distinctions between the higher education accreditation instruments based on seven standards and those based on nine criteria:

1. **Emphasis of Assessment:** The seven-standards accreditation instrument prioritizes input and process dimensions, whereas the nine-criteria instrument places significant emphasis on output and outcome aspects.
2. **Alignment with National Standards:** A critical focus of the nine-criteria accreditation instrument is the fulfillment and surpassing of the National Standards of Higher Education. This instrument is designed to evaluate how effectively universities meet and exceed the minimum standards established by the National Standards of Higher Education. This represents a notable advancement from the prior seven-standards

accreditation instrument, which was unable to assess alignment with the National Standards due to its development in 2011, three years prior to the official establishment of these standards in 2014.

3. Variations in Performance Demands: The discrepancies in performance expectations and accreditation ratings—differentiating between 'A' and Excellent, 'B' and Very Good, as well as 'C' and Good—illustrate a transition in quality assessment standards (BAN-PT, 2020).

The reform of higher education accreditation policy, transitioning from a seven-standards evaluation model to a nine-criteria framework, has generated three significant challenges in its implementation across Indonesian universities. First, the conversion of accreditation ratings necessitates the preparation of a Conversion Supplement Instrument by universities to align previous ratings with the new system. Second, re-accreditation has become an option for universities aiming to enhance or maintain their status under the updated criteria. Third, the Monitoring of Accreditation Rating Evaluation facilitates automatic accreditation extensions without reapplication; however, institutions may still risk losing their prior ratings if the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education determines they no longer meet the requisite standards (Mudlofir, 2021).

The heightened quality demands of the nine-criteria accreditation system have resulted in a decline in accreditation scores for numerous universities and study programs, with some failing to attain the minimum requirement (not accredited). This challenge is not confined to general universities but also substantially impacts Islamic Higher Education Institutions. According to the Higher Education database in 2021, there are 58 State Islamic Religious Universities encompassing a total of 1,230 study programs (Junaidah & Ayu, 2019), alongside approximately 830 Private Islamic Religious Universities distributed across 15 regions under the oversight of the Coordinating Body for Private Islamic Universities (Kholis et al., 2021). These institutions are encountering difficulties in meeting the more stringent standards, underscoring the necessity for enhanced quality assurance systems, improved institutional readiness, and targeted assistance from regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

In 2021, the field assessment results conducted by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education revealed that there were five state-owned study programs, 73 privately owned study programs, and 60 private Islamic religious universities that did not meet the accreditation ranking requirements. Specifically, the Nusa Tenggara region, which encompasses the province of Bali, West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara, under the jurisdiction of the Coordinating Body for Private Islamic Higher Education Region XIV Mataram, is encountering significant accreditation challenges. Among the 36 private Islamic religious universities in the Nusa Tenggara region, three universities and nine study programs have been officially classified as failing to meet the accreditation rating requirements. This number may increase, as several other universities and study programs have yet to prepare and submit their accreditation documents to the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education. This situation underscores a broader issue of inadequate institutional preparedness and the weak implementation of internal quality assurance systems across many higher education institutions in the region (Secretary of Coordinating Body for Private Islamic Higher Education Region XIV Mataram, Interview, April 4, 2023).

The presence of universities and study programs that do not meet accreditation requirements indicates a deficiency in the effective implementation of internal quality assurance systems, which are critical determinants of a university's accreditation rating (Junaidah & Ayu, 2019). According to the provisions established by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education in 2020, a university and its study programs attain an accreditation rating only if the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System achieves a minimum score of ≤ 2.0 (BAN-PT, 2019). Furthermore, the effective implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System is essential for maintaining the quality of graduates, thereby enhancing their employability within the business and industry sectors, as it ensures the relevance of

academic programs in relation to the needs of stakeholders and employers (Sauri et al., 2019).

The rising number of universities and academic programs in the Nusa Tenggara region that do not meet accreditation rating requirements underscores a significant concern regarding the quality of higher education. This phenomenon reflects broader challenges in the implementation of internal quality assurance systems, particularly with respect to the establishment of quality assurance bodies, the availability of quality documentation, and the cultivation of a quality culture within Private Islamic Religious Universities. These challenges emphasize the urgency of the present study, which aims to investigate the implementation of internal quality assurance systems and to identify the obstacles encountered by institutions in the region. The findings are anticipated to inform policy recommendations designed to enhance university governance in alignment with national accreditation standards, especially given the increasing impact of accreditation ratings on students' university selection processes (Widayat, 2018).

METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative field research approach grounded in the constructivist paradigm, which emphasizes reflexivity and indexicality (Bakri, 2003) while fostering empathetic, dialectical interactions between the researcher and participants (Birowo, 2004). The interpretation of research findings was constructed through the researcher's understanding of participants' perspectives (Muhadjir, 2000).

The research was conducted in Indonesia, specifically within the Nusa Tenggara region, encompassing the provinces of Bali, West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara. The focus was on Private Islamic Religious Universities under the jurisdiction of the Coordinating Body for Private Islamic Higher Education, Region XIV Mataram.

The population for this study comprised all Private Islamic Religious Universities within the region, totaling 34 institutions with 112 study programs. A purposive sampling method was employed, concentrating on institutions that did not meet accreditation standards. From the total population, six universities were identified as failing to fulfill the minimum accreditation requirements and were selected as research subjects. Key informants included university leaders and managers of Internal Quality Assurance Units, chosen based on their direct involvement and relevance to the implementation of the internal quality assurance system (Sugiono, 2005).

To ensure the comprehensiveness, depth, holism, and contextual relevance of the data, the following collection techniques were employed: 1) Observation, which involved systematically observing and recording the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System. The type of observation utilized in this research was non-participant systematic observation, wherein researchers did not actively engage in the Internal Quality Assurance System implementation activities; 2) Interviews, which involved a dialogue between researchers and informants, including university leaders and managers of Internal Quality Assurance Systems at each Private Islamic Religious University. The interview method employed was a mixed-pattern interview (free guided), based on a pre-prepared interview guide, while allowing for variations in questions tailored to the situational context encountered in the field; and 3) Documentation, which entailed extracting data from records related to the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System.

To ensure that the collected data remained pertinent to the research questions, it was analyzed concurrently using an interactive model comprising three key stages: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification (Miles et al., 2014). The validity and reliability of the data, serving as the basis for conclusions, were established through credibility testing. This process involved prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, and data triangulation. These strategies contributed to enhancing the

trustworthiness of the findings and provided evidence of the multiple realities encountered throughout the research process (Moleong, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System in this study concentrates on several critical dimensions: the presence of quality assurance bodies, the availability and comprehensiveness of quality documentation, and the integration of a quality culture within each university. These dimensions are fundamental for assessing the efficacy of the Internal Quality Assurance System in facilitating institutional quality enhancement and in fulfilling national accreditation criteria.

Availability of Internal Quality Assurance System Bodies

All six sampled Private Islamic Religious Universities in the Nusa Tenggara region have formally established Internal Quality Assurance Bodies, primarily in the form of Quality Assurance Centers, between 2020 and 2021. However, none have developed supporting structures, such as Quality Assurance Clusters at the faculty or study program level, nor have they established units for Internal Quality Auditors. These omissions indicate a partial and centralized approach to internal quality assurance governance.

Field data suggest that the establishment of Quality Assurance Centers within the observed institutions was largely reactive, emerging in response to external accreditation demands rather than as a result of deliberate, long-term strategic planning. In the initial years following the founding of these institutions, there was a notable absence of structured quality assurance mechanisms. As one institutional leader reflected:

“When the institution was first established in 2016, a formal quality assurance unit had not yet been developed. At that stage, institutional leaders lacked sufficient understanding of the critical role that a quality assurance body plays in higher education governance.” (Interview, June 14, 2023).

The subsequent formation of Quality Assurance Centers was driven predominantly by the procedural requirements set forth by accrediting bodies. This sentiment was reinforced by a quality assurance coordinator who stated:

“The establishment of our quality assurance center was primarily motivated by the immediate need to fulfill accreditation requirements, rather than being part of our long-term strategic initiative.” (Interview, June 14, 2023).

These accounts highlight that the inception of quality assurance organs was motivated by compliance rather than commitment, underscoring a broader pattern of accreditation-driven institutional responses across the region.

Moreover, the absence of formal institutional frameworks for conducting Internal Quality Audits has resulted in the delegation of monitoring responsibilities to academic staff on an informal and ad-hoc basis. These informal practices are typically unstructured, undocumented, and lack institutional oversight. In most cases, monitoring activities are limited to the teaching components of academic standards, such as classroom attendance, syllabi preparation, and basic assessment practices, without extending to a comprehensive evaluation of the broader spectrum of indicators as outlined by the National Standards of Higher Education. Critical aspects such as research productivity, community engagement, graduate employability, learning outcomes assessment, and academic service quality remain largely unevaluated. This fragmented approach not only undermines the systematic application of the Internal Quality Assurance System cycle but also reflects a weak institutional culture of continuous quality improvement.

Quality Document Fulfillment

All institutions participating in this study reported the formal development of the four core quality assurance documents mandated by the Ministry of Education: the quality policy, quality manual, quality standards, and quality procedures/forms. However, field data indicated that while these documents exist in form, their substantive function, integration, and governance remain substantially underdeveloped.

In practice, the preparation of internal quality assurance documents was frequently conducted in a reactive and perfunctory manner, primarily to satisfy the immediate procedural requirements of accreditation assessments. Documentation was typically generated as part of accreditation preparation rather than as a product of ongoing institutional reflection, planning, or internal evaluation. Consequently, these documents were seldom embedded within the operational practices of academic or administrative units.

A significant gap exists in the management and storage of quality documents. Most institutions lacked a centralized archival system or a dedicated office responsible for the systematic administration of quality-related documentation. Physical copies of documents were often dispersed across various departments or held by individual staff members, with no clear filing procedures or document control mechanisms established. This decentralized approach resulted in inconsistencies in accessibility and impeded continuity, particularly during leadership transitions or staff turnover.

From the perspective of digital infrastructure, institutional websites did not function as effective repositories or communication channels for quality assurance-related information. Only a limited number of institutions had uploaded portions of their quality documents online, and even in those cases, the materials were often incomplete or outdated. In one instance, the only publicly accessible document on the institutional website was a single Quality Standard file dated 2017, thereby highlighting a lack of commitment to transparency and stakeholder access.

Moreover, the content of the quality standards themselves exhibited limited innovation or contextualization. None of the institutions had developed internal standards that exceeded the minimum benchmarks prescribed by the National Standards of Higher Education. The standards were frequently adopted verbatim from national templates, with minimal adaptation to reflect the institution's unique vision, mission, or regional challenges. This situation represents a missed opportunity to assert institutional identity and align quality frameworks with local priorities or the needs of specific academic communities. This compliance-oriented approach was candidly acknowledged by a quality assurance coordinator who noted,

"Our quality documents were prepared primarily for accreditation purposes. Beyond that, they are rarely consulted or updated" (Interview, June 14, 2023).

Such statements underscore a broader institutional tendency to regard quality documents as symbolic artifacts rather than as dynamic tools for governance and continuous improvement. The internal quality assurance documentation, while formally present, has yet to integrate into academic planning, decision-making, or quality enhancement processes. This gap suggests that quality assurance remains procedurally driven and has not evolved into a strategic or cultural function within the institutions studied.

Implementation of Quality Culture

Although all institutions in this study formally established minimum quality standards in accordance with the requirements of the Internal Quality Assurance System, the subsequent stages of the quality assurance cycle—Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement—were neither comprehensively nor systematically executed. The implementation phase was generally limited in scope, with institutional efforts primarily concentrated on fundamental teaching-related standards, such as instructional delivery, syllabus preparation, and student attendance. Even within this restricted framework,

execution was hampered by significant human resource limitations. Several academic programs operated with only four or five permanent lecturers, many of whom had not yet attained doctoral qualifications or held functional academic ranks. These capacity constraints significantly impaired the institutions' ability to meet even the basic expectations of higher education delivery.

Other core dimensions, particularly research and community engagement, were notably underdeveloped. None of the six institutions surveyed possessed internal research funding mechanisms, and lecturers reported challenges in accessing competitive external research grants. Consequently, research productivity, including scholarly publications and applied innovations, remained minimal. Community engagement initiatives were similarly underdeveloped across the observed institutions. These activities, which represent a fundamental pillar of higher education, lacked structured planning, formal documentation, and clear evaluative metrics to measure impact or relevance. In most instances, community engagement was conducted sporadically, often driven by personal initiative rather than institutional policy. Activities were rarely aligned with institutional strategic goals or local societal needs, and there was minimal follow-up or assessment to determine their outcomes. The absence of standard operating procedures, performance indicators, or quality benchmarks further constrained the institutions' ability to monitor, evaluate, and enhance their community engagement programs. As a result, community engagement was treated more as a symbolic obligation than as a meaningful, mission-driven function of the institution.

Monitoring and evaluation functions were largely absent. Across all institutions, there was no evidence of structured internal quality audits, stakeholder satisfaction surveys, or routine evaluation reports. Where some form of monitoring occurred, it was sporadic, lacked standardized instruments, and was rarely documented or archived. The absence of such infrastructure limited the institutions' capacity to conduct evidence-based quality assurance or promote institutional learning.

Improvement mechanisms, the final step of the quality assurance cycle, were also underdeveloped. Even when quality issues were informally identified, they were seldom followed by formal action plans, systematic interventions, or the reallocation of institutional resources. Responses to identified gaps were reactive and typically triggered only in proximity to accreditation deadlines. As one quality assurance coordinator articulated:

"While we have set some minimum standards, we lack the mechanisms and resources to monitor or improve them. In many cases, no one follows up unless accreditation is approaching." (Interview, June 15, 2023).

This pattern illustrates the absence of institutional feedback loops, which are essential for embedding a sustainable and responsive quality culture. Quality assurance practices across the institutions remained episodic and compliance-driven, rather than being integrated within strategic planning or budgeting processes. Ultimately, these findings reflect a superficial adoption of the quality assurance framework, with limited operational integration and weak institutional commitment to continuous quality improvement.

Obstacles to Internal Quality Assurance Implementation

The implementation of Internal Quality Assurance Systems across the observed universities was significantly obstructed by a confluence of structural, institutional, and contextual barriers. These impediments adversely affected the development of sustainable quality assurance mechanisms and compromised the efficacy of the quality assurance cycle.

Limited Awareness and Understanding

A predominant challenge identified was the insufficient conceptual grasp of Internal Quality Assurance Systems among institutional leaders, academic staff, and quality assurance personnel. In numerous instances, the quality assurance system was perceived merely as a

bureaucratic or technical requirement imposed by accreditation bodies, rather than as a strategic instrument for continuous institutional enhancement. As articulated by one quality assurance coordinator:

“Quality assurance is still seen as an administrative burden. Many think it only matters when accreditation is near, not as part of continuous institutional development.” (Interview, June 14, 2023).

This perception relegated quality assurance activities to compliance-based formalities, resulting in minimal engagement from academic stakeholders and senior management. The lack of comprehensive socialization and capacity-building initiatives further exacerbated this knowledge deficit.

Lack of Strategic Alignment

Quality assurance activities were not integrated within the institutions' broader strategic planning or operational frameworks. There was scant evidence of alignment between quality assurance and critical institutional instruments such as the Strategic Plan and Operational Plan. Consequently, the implementation of quality assurance tended to occur in isolation, lacking coordination with budgeting, human resource development, or academic planning. Few institutions had formulated specific quality assurance work plans, and almost none had allocated a dedicated annual budget line to support internal quality assurance operations, as noted by one institutional leader:

“We don't have a dedicated quality assurance budget. If there's no accreditation coming, there's rarely any funding allocated to quality related programs.” (Interview, June 14, 2023).

This disjunction resulted in fragmented execution and limited institutional ownership of the quality agenda.

Financial Constraints

Severe financial constraints represented a significant impediment to institutional advancement. All institutions involved in this study primarily depended on student tuition fees as their sole source of income, with limited or no access to external funding avenues, such as competitive government grants, research endowments, or collaborative partnerships. This reliance imposed stringent limitations on institutional expenditures, particularly in areas essential for quality enhancement, including faculty training, the development of quality management systems, the acquisition of educational resources, and the upgrading of both physical and digital infrastructure. This situation was aptly summarized by one participant's statement:

“Because our income is unstable and depends only on tuition.” (Interview, June 15, 2023).

Human Resource Shortages

Quality assurance units were frequently understaffed and inadequately resourced. In most instances, these units comprised one or two part-time staff members, who concurrently managed other administrative or academic responsibilities. Very few individuals had received formal training in quality assurance principles, standards, or practices. One quality assurance coordinator articulated the situation as follows:

“In our quality assurance unit, it's just me and one admin staff. Neither of us has a background in quality management, and we're also handling other tasks.” (Interview, June 15, 2023).

Moreover, the lack of certified internal auditors and the absence of regular professional development opportunities significantly hindered these units' capacity to conduct effective internal reviews, facilitate capacity building, or implement quality improvement initiatives.

Absence of Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Critically, none of the observed institutions had established systematic mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. Instruments such as academic audits, internal benchmarking, tracer studies, or institutional self-assessment reports were either nonexistent or applied inconsistently. This deficiency hindered institutions' ability to monitor progress, identify areas of underperformance, or implement evidence-based improvements, as illustrated by the following statement:

"We know we have problems, but we don't have the system or tools to track them properly. So, things stay the same until someone from outside points them out." (Interview, June 15, 2023).

In the absence of institutional feedback loops, the quality assurance cycle remained fragmented, resulting in a quality assurance process that was largely static and document-oriented, with minimal impact on actual academic quality or overall institutional performance.

Discussion

Consciously and rationally, individuals, organizations, and institutions, whether private or public, strive to achieve and deliver high-quality outcomes. Based on this premise, various initiatives are implemented to utilize available resources effectively in order to attain the desired quality standards. This imperative is especially significant for higher education institutions, which bear the responsibility of producing qualified graduates through high-quality 'Tridharma' activities (education, research, and community engagement). Attaining such quality outcomes necessitates meticulous resource management that encompasses planning, implementation, monitoring, and thorough evaluation. Quality results are not achieved instantaneously; rather, they require a sustained process involving qualified resources and rigorous quality assurance practices.

In the context of Private Islamic Religious Universities in the Nusa Tenggara region, the inability of several institutions to meet the minimum accreditation standards established by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education reflects systemic issues in the execution of the Internal Quality Assurance System. Current findings indicate that the Internal Quality Assurance System at many institutions has not been implemented in accordance with the regulations set forth by the government and accreditation bodies. This gap underscores the urgent need for comprehensive improvements in the governance of quality assurance systems across these institutions. The role of the Coordinating Body for Private Islamic Higher Education Region XIV Mataram, as a supervisory entity, is therefore critical in providing structured guidance, ongoing monitoring, and consistent evaluation to the universities within its jurisdiction.

The misalignment between the management of private institutions and the standards delineated in the national higher education framework arises from various challenges, most notably policy constraints, insufficient knowledge, and limited awareness among university administrators. Consequently, quality assurance practices remain underdeveloped and disconnected from broader institutional planning. Importantly, the implementation of a quality assurance system is not merely an administrative compliance issue but also a constitutional mandate that reinforces the public's right to high-quality education. From the perspective of the "fitness for use" theory, the role of quality assurance is to ensure that services and outputs meet the needs and expectations of users (Tenner & DeToro, 1992).

According to Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, university governance must adhere to the principles of autonomy, accountability, quality assurance, transparency, and

evaluation. This is further reinforced by the issuance of Law No. 12/2012, Article 52, which stipulates that quality assurance must be a systemic and continuous activity aimed at enhancing educational quality sustainably (Hedwig & Polla, 2006). Therefore, quality assurance must be embedded as a routine institutional function rather than treated as a one-time accreditation requirement.

To operationalize this mandate, higher education institutions are required to implement internal quality assurance mechanisms that align with both the Higher Education Standards and national legislation. The Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3/2020 outlines the core standards that universities must meet, and achieving this necessitates institutional systems capable of consistently monitoring, evaluating, and improving quality. Hence, the establishment of an effective internal quality assurance framework is not only a legal obligation but also a strategic necessity for institutional survival in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

From a service quality perspective, higher education quality can be evaluated through two primary lenses: (1) the product-based approach, which focuses on the measurable attributes of graduates, and (2) the user-based approach, which defines quality in terms of user satisfaction—particularly among students, alumni, and external partners (Mudie & Pirrie, 2006). Both dimensions are essential for understanding and enhancing the quality of services delivered by universities.

Under the accreditation frameworks of higher education accreditation 3.0 (institution-level) and 4.0 (study program-level), the implementation of internal quality assurance is fundamental to achieving favorable accreditation outcomes. It also ensures that academic programs remain relevant to the needs of external stakeholders, particularly graduate users (Sauri et al., 2019). Furthermore, robust quality assurance mechanisms bolster institutional competitiveness by strengthening public trust and enhancing user satisfaction.

In this context, quality assurance not only serves institutional legitimacy but also supports long-term sustainability by ensuring continual compliance with academic standards. The quality of higher education is ultimately reflected in accreditation ratings, which serve as government benchmarks for evaluating institutional performance. Accreditation functions as both a regulatory and developmental tool that facilitates institutional improvement.

To monitor the implementation of internal quality assurance, the government enforces a cyclical evaluation process through periodic accreditation, conducted every five years by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education and the Independent Accreditation Institution. Since 2018, the accreditation framework has transitioned towards a 9-criteria model that emphasizes outputs and outcomes over inputs and processes. This shift indicates a movement from a rule-based to a principle-based accreditation model (BAN-PT, 2020).

This transformation entails several key paradigm shifts: (1) a reorientation from input-process to output-outcome indicators; (2) a change in university roles from merely completing forms to engaging in self-evaluation; (3) a revision of assessor roles from information documentation to performance assessment; (4) a shift in accreditation focus from compliance to continuous quality improvement; and (5) increased university participation in the preparation and review of accreditation documentation.

In this model, the successful implementation of internal quality assurance is assessed by the presence of quality assurance structures, governance documents, institutional culture, and verifiable evidence of impact. Institutions must achieve a minimum score of 2.0 in the quality assurance dimension to qualify for accreditation (BAN-PT, 2019). A critical feature of this framework is the coherence between institutional plans, program implementation, and evaluation outcomes, with university leadership bearing full accountability for accreditation results.

The ultimate goal of a functioning quality assurance system is to ensure that graduates meet competency standards, align with labor market needs, and are prepared to contribute meaningfully to society. Furthermore, quality assurance mechanisms help maintain academic

standards, ensure graduate employability, and promote user satisfaction (Sauri et al., 2019). In essence, quality assurance serves both as a regulatory requirement and a commitment to fulfilling the expectations of internal and external stakeholders (Tenner & DeToro, 1992).

However, as Hedwig & Polla (2006) emphasize, quality assurance must be an ongoing institutional practice, not a sporadic activity. Achieving institutional quality requires systematic efforts, beginning with the establishment of governance structures, standard operating procedures, a quality culture, and sustained organizational commitment. Without a solid process design, the risk of recurring quality failures remains high (Muhandri & Kadarsiman, 2012).

CONCLUSION

The investigation into the implementation of Internal Quality Assurance at Private Islamic Religious Universities in the Nusa Tenggara region reveals that, while all institutions have formally developed the requisite quality assurance documents—such as quality policies, manuals, standards, and procedures—these documents are frequently produced in a manner oriented towards compliance rather than integration into routine academic or administrative practices. The implementation of the quality assurance cycle, encompassing determination, implementation, evaluation, control, and improvement, is characterized as partial and unsystematic, with the majority of activities focused predominantly on teaching standards and insufficient emphasis on research and community engagement. The lack of functional feedback loops, strategic alignment, and monitoring mechanisms significantly undermines the sustainability and effectiveness of quality assurance practices.

From a practical standpoint, this study underscores the pressing need for a paradigm shift in institutional mindset, moving from an accreditation-driven documentation approach to a framework of continuous quality improvement. For Internal Quality Assurance to serve as an effective management tool, it must be ingrained in strategic planning, adequately resourced, and bolstered by committed leadership. Enhancing the capacity of quality assurance units, developing localized quality standards, and ensuring regular monitoring and internal audits are essential measures for Private Islamic Religious Universities to improve their institutional performance and accreditation outcomes.

For future research, it is advisable to examine the influence of leadership commitment, organizational culture, and digital infrastructure on the effectiveness of quality assurance. Comparative studies between Private Islamic Religious Universities that have attained high accreditation ratings and those that have not may provide valuable insights into best practices and success factors.

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