

Integrating Pesantren Values into Internal Quality Assurance Systems: Advancing Quality Higher Education (SDG 4) in Islamic Boarding School-Based Universities

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To investigate how pesantren-based private Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIS) integrate internal quality assurance systems (SPMI) with institution-specific religious values, cultivate a sustainable quality culture, and advance Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) while preserving their distinctive identities. **Method:** A qualitative multisite case study was conducted at Universitas Ibrahimy (UNIB) Situbondo, Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA) Probolinggo, and Universitas Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor Ponorogo. Data were generated through in-depth interviews with 21 purposively selected institutional leaders and quality-assurance actors, participant observations of quality meetings and audits, and analysis of institutional quality documents. We conducted within-case analysis, followed by cross-site pattern matching using iterative data condensation, display, and verification. **Results:** All three institutions implement the PPEPP cycle, Internal Quality Audits (AMI), Management Review Meetings (RTM), and tiered quality structures, yet they enact these mechanisms through three context-specific configurations: adaptive-traditional at UNIB, standardization-integrative at UNUJA, and total-integrative at UNIDA. Key enablers include dual-authority leadership, ethical commitments to *khidmah*, *itqan*, and *amanah*, trained auditors, and digital monitoring platforms; constraints include compliance fatigue, uneven digital literacy, role overload, and fragmented administrative data. **Novelty:** To develop a Contextual-Integrative Quality Pathway showing how regulatory quality architectures become substantive when translated through pesantren ethical capital, thereby linking formal assurance mechanisms with locally legitimate practices of continuous improvement and SDG 4.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) positions inclusive and equitable quality education as a central condition for sustainable development. In higher education, achieving this goal depends not only on expanding access but also on building institutional capacity to sustain academic standards, accountable governance, and continuous improvement. Contemporary quality-assurance scholarship therefore increasingly treats quality as an organizational capability rather than a periodic accreditation exercise (Anand et al., 2023; Nugraha et al., 2023; Vašenda & Čadil, 2024). For institutions in resource-constrained and culturally distinctive settings, the critical issue is how to make formal assurance mechanisms locally meaningful without weakening their regulatory rigor.

This issue is especially salient in Indonesian Islamic higher education. The National Education Management Information System (EMIS) records 1,001 Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKI), of which 942 (94%) are Private Institutions (PTKIS) and 59 (6%) are state institutions (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2025). In East Java, 175 of 204 PTKIS (85.78%) are institutionally embedded in pondok pesantren ecosystems (Kopertais Wilayah IV Jawa Timur, 2024). Consequently, the quality of pesantren-based

higher education is not a peripheral concern: it directly affects access, institutional sustainability, and the realization of SDG 4 for communities for whom these institutions are often the most socially and geographically accessible form of tertiary education.

Despite their strategic importance, private faith-based institutions frequently face a tension between external accountability and internally owned improvement. Regional evidence indicates substantial variation in accreditation outcomes. At the same time, research on higher education quality assurance shows that compliance-heavy regimes can generate documentation burdens, fragmented quality processes, and symbolic responses when internal actors perceive assurance primarily as external control (Cardoso et al., 2019; Fadhli, 2020; Harvey, 2024; Tamrat, 2022). The problem is therefore not the absence of standards, but the possibility that formal standards become organizationally decoupled from everyday academic practice. In the Indonesian context, this risk is particularly relevant when accreditation requirements are treated as an end point rather than as one component of an internally driven quality system (Bahri et al., 2020; Suban, 2020).

Quality-culture research offers a more generative perspective. A mature quality culture combines structural elements-standards, procedures, data systems, review cycles, and accountability arrangements-with shared commitments, professional agency, and collective responsibility for improvement (Bendermacher et al., 2017; Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2020; Hsu, 2023; Iqbal et al., 2023; Rahnuma, 2020). From this perspective, internal quality assurance is effective when it becomes embedded in organizational routines and professional meaning-making rather than remaining an additional layer of bureaucracy. Yet much of the international literature has been developed in secular or nationally standardized systems, leaving limited explanation of how quality mechanisms operate in institutions where religious authority, communal traditions, and academic governance coexist.

Pesantren-based universities provide a theoretically productive setting for addressing this gap because modern quality-management technologies encounter long-established pedagogical traditions, classical Islamic scholarship, and the moral authority of kyai and other pesantren leaders. The national PPEPP cycle – determination, implementation, evaluation, control, and improvement - therefore operates within an institutional field shaped simultaneously by state regulation and religious-ethical commitments. Recent Indonesian studies suggest that internal quality assurance in Islamic higher education can be strengthened when formal mechanisms are aligned with institutional values and local quality practices (Iskarim et al., 2025; Lathifah et al., 2022). This convergence can be understood as a form of “quality work” in which formal structures and cultural resources are actively connected in practice (Elken & Stensaker, 2018).

Against this background, this study aims to explain how pesantren-based universities translate formal quality-assurance requirements into institutionally legitimate practices, how this translation shapes quality culture, and how the resulting arrangements contribute to SDG 4. Empirically, the study compares three prominent East Java institutions-Universitas Ibrahimy (UNIB) Situbondo, Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA) Probolinggo, and Universitas Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor Ponorogo-which represent distinct institutional genealogies, governance arrangements, and quality trajectories (Fauzi, 2026). Conceptually, the study develops a cross-site explanation of the relationship among regulatory standards, pesantren ethical values, organizational quality infrastructure, and continuous improvement. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do pesantren-based universities operationalize the PPEPP quality-assurance cycle and embed quality culture across organizational levels?
2. What institutional enablers and structural constraints shape the implementation of internal quality assurance in pesantren-based higher education?
3. What cross-site conceptual model explains how pesantren values and modern quality architectures interact to support sustainable quality education under SDG 4?

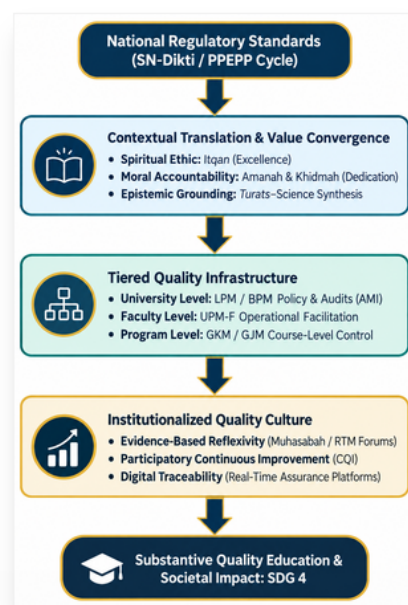


Figure 1. Contextual-integrative quality pathway linking pesantren values to SDG 4

RESEARCH METHOD

Research design

This study employed a qualitative multisite case-study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The design was selected because the phenomenon of interest-the interaction between internal quality-assurance systems and institutional quality culture-is context-dependent and embedded in organizational history, governance, and religious tradition. Multisite analysis enabled analytical replication across contrasting institutional settings. We examined each case on its own terms before using cross-site pattern matching to identify recurring mechanisms and context-specific variations. The primary unit of analysis was the institutional internal quality-assurance system and its relationship with the emergent quality culture.

Study setting and participant selection

The study was conducted at three private Islamic universities affiliated with established pesantren in East Java, Indonesia. The sites were purposively selected to maximize institutional variation while retaining a common faith-based organizational context:

1. Universitas Ibrahimy (UNIB), Sukorejo, Situbondo. The university developed from the Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo pesantren tradition and is characterized by classical Islamic jurisprudential scholarship, a strong Salaf identity, and close community ties.
2. Universitas Nurul Jadid (UNUJA), Paiton, Probolinggo. Established in 2017 through the merger of three higher-education institutions under Yayasan Nurul Jadid, UNUJA combines pesantren values with organizational standardization, digital administration, and community-oriented development.

3. Universitas Darussalam (UNIDA) Gontor, Siman, Ponorogo. Emerging from Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, UNIDA operates a fully residential university-in-pesantren model characterized by bilingual education, waqf-based governance, and the Islamization of contemporary knowledge.

Table 1. Institutional case context and empirical focus

Institution	Governance and Context	Academic Portfolio	Quality Framework Emphasized
UNIB Situbondo	Traditional Salaf 28 foundation; SANTRI strong philosophy; rural-community ties.	active study programs (D3, S1, S2, S3, digital professional); 5,330 students; 233 faculty members (ratio 1:22.88).	PPEPP cycle; Iqra 9 platform; Islamic jurisprudence benchmarks; Siklus Ishlah.
UNUJA Probolinggo	Unified post-merger structure; Trilogi and Panca Kesadaran digitalized administration.	active study programs (D3, S1, S2, S3, digital professional); 5,939 students; 174 faculty members (ratio 1:34.13).	Integrated single SOP (POS Tunggal); ISO 21001:2018 and ISO 9001:2015; institutional SPMI portal.
UNIDA Gontor	Modern waqf-based governance; fully residential model; Arabic-English bilingual environment; Panca Jiwa.	active study programs (D4, S1, S2, S3, digital professional); 5,846 students; 254 faculty members (ratio 1:23.02).	Nineteen Fountain of Wisdom standards; integrated residential-academic governance; SIMUDA/SIMUTU systems.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, supplemented by snowball sampling, to identify actors directly responsible for quality policy, implementation, audit, and follow-up. The final sample comprised 21 key informants across the three sites, including rectors and vice-rectors, directors and secretaries of quality-assurance agencies (LPM/LPPM/BPM), faculty deans, heads of study programs (KPS), Internal Quality Audit (AMI) auditors, and personnel from quality-control units (GKM/GJM/GPM). Recruitment continued until the interviews no longer generated substantively new themes relevant to the study's analytical categories.

Data collection and analytic procedure

Data were generated through three complementary techniques during prolonged field engagement:

- In-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 21 key informants. Questions addressed quality standards, the operationalization of the PPEPP cycle, Internal Quality Audits, leadership intervention, value internalization, and procedural bottlenecks.
- Participant observation. The study conducted passive and moderate participant observation during quality-coordination forums, Management Review Meetings (RTM), AMI auditor briefings, and routine departmental review meetings.
- Documentary analysis. The study examined institutional statutes, strategic plans, quality manuals, AMI instruments, self-evaluation reports, corrective-action requests, and relevant ISO audit records to corroborate interview and observational evidence.

Data analysis followed the interactive logic of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2018). Interview transcripts, field notes,

and documents were coded iteratively through open, axial, and selective coding. We first conducted within-case analysis to preserve contextual integrity; we then developed cross-site matrices to compare recurring patterns, divergent institutional configurations, and explanatory mechanisms. Trustworthiness was strengthened through source and method triangulation, member checking with key institutional informants, peer debriefing, prolonged engagement, and maintenance of an auditable chain of evidence. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and institutional records were handled confidentially in accordance with the approved research protocols.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Cross-site analysis identified six interrelated practices through which formal quality assurance was translated into an institutionally embedded quality culture: philosophical anchoring, tiered quality infrastructure, contextualized standard setting, internal audit and evaluation, leadership review, and quality habituation. These practices were present across all three universities, although their organizational expression differed substantially by institutional history and pesantren tradition. Table 2 summarizes the principal cross-site patterns and their relevance to SDG 4.

Table 2. Cross-site matrix of quality assurance practices and institutional outcomes

Quality Practice	UNIB Situbondo (Adaptive- Traditional)	UNUJA Probolinggo (Standardization- Integrative)	UNIDA Gontor (Total- Integrative)	Contribution to SDG 4
Philosophical anchoring	SANTRI values and preservation-renewal principle.	Trilogi and Panca Kesadaran Santri; quality framed as amanah.	Panca Jiwa and Islamization of contemporary knowledge.	Strengthens of ethical accountability and character-oriented learning.
Tiered quality infrastructure	LPM (university), UPM-F (faculty), GKM (study program).	LPPM unified procedures; GKM/GJM decentralized levels.	with BPM specialized functions and implementation at UPM/GPM units.	Distributes responsibility from institutional governance to academic delivery.
Standard setting and PPEPP	National standards combined with classical-text competency benchmarks.	SN-Dikti supplemented by ISO 21001:2018 and ISO 9001:2015.	Nineteen institutional standards spanning academic and residential life.	Supports curricular rigor, consistency, and multidimension al learning outcomes.
Internal audit and evaluation	Twenty-two certified auditors using the Iqra 9 platform.	Unified audits supported by the institutional SPMI portal and cross-unit auditing.	Biannual cross-faculty reviews tracked through SIMUDA/SIMU TU.	Generates diagnostic evidence for academic and operational improvement.

Quality Practice	UNIB Situbondo (Adaptive-Traditional)	UNUJA Probolinggo (Standardization-Integrative)	UNIDA Gontor (Total-Integrative)	Contribution to SDG 4
Leadership review (RTM)	AMI findings linked to annual budgeting (RKAL) and corrective action.	RTM functions as a management-foundation review and risk forum.	Audit resolutions directly into institutional development directives.	Connects diagnosis with managerial action and resource allocation.
Quality habituation	Quality enacted as khidmah (service) and itqan (professional excellence).	Administrative discipline and unified procedures normalize quality routines.	Residential immersion integrates study, worship, discipline, and institutional life.	Builds intrinsic commitment, organizational ownership, and continuous improvement.

Translating regulatory mandates through pesantren ethical frameworks

Across the three sites, implementation of the PPEPP cycle was not experienced solely as compliance with statutory requirements. Institutional leaders actively interpreted national quality criteria through ethical vocabularies already legitimate within their pesantren communities. This translation process reduced the perceived distance between formal quality assurance and everyday academic practice, allowing regulatory requirements to be framed as extensions of established moral obligations rather than as externally imposed administrative routines.

At UNIB, quality is articulated through the SANTRI value code-Shiddiq, ‘Adalah wa Amanah, Nahdliyah, Tawasuth wa Ta’awun, Ri’ayah, and Istiqomah-and through the classical maxim al-muhafadhatu ‘ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah. The Rector described quality assurance as an expression of academic and religious trust inherited from the institution’s founders and senior scholars rather than as a bureaucratic import.

“At Ibrahimy, quality is not limited to achieving national or international standards. More fundamentally, it is the realization of an academic and religious trust inherited from our founders and senior scholars, in accordance with the maxim al-muhafadhatu ‘ala al-qadim al-shalih wa al-akhdzu bi al-jadid al-ashlah.” (Rector, UNIB; translated from Indonesian)

At UNUJA, quality requirements are interpreted through the Trilogi Santri and Panca Kesadaran Santri, which connect religious duty, moral conduct, intellectual development, social responsibility, nationalism, and organizational awareness. These values helped create a shared institutional vocabulary following the merger of previously separate higher-education entities. In practice, amanah (trustworthiness) and itqan (professional exactness) function as normative justifications for standardized procedures and accountable performance.

At UNIDA Gontor, internal quality assurance is embedded in the Panca Jiwa ethos-Sincerity, Simplicity, Self-Reliance, Islamic Brotherhood, and Freedom-and in a fully residential educational system. Nineteen institutional standards grouped under The Fountain of Wisdom extend quality expectations beyond classroom delivery to residential life, language practice, discipline, and spiritual formation. In this

configuration, assurance is embedded in a continuous institutional environment in which academic, moral, and residential practices are governed as an integrated whole.

Operationalizing tiered structures and closing the audit loop

All three universities established multi-level quality structures that distribute responsibility from the university level to faculties and study programs. Although the organizational nomenclature differs, each system combines a central quality-assurance agency with meso-level faculty units and program-level quality groups. This cascading structure allows institutional standards to be interpreted and monitored closer to the point of academic delivery.

- University level. LPM at UNIB, LPPM at UNUJA, and BPM at UNIDA report to senior university leadership and coordinate quality policy, audit strategy, and institutional follow-up.
- Faculty level. UPM-F/UPM units monitor implementation across departments and consolidate faculty-level evidence for internal review.
- Study-program level. GKM/GJM/GPM units are embedded within study programs and monitor operational compliance, learning documentation, and follow-up actions closest to classroom practice.

The most consequential feature across the sites was the formal linkage between Internal Quality Audit (AMI) findings and Management Review Meetings (RTM). At UNIB, more than 85% of audit findings were reported as resolved within the subsequent semester, supported by the linkage between audit follow-up and annual budget allocations (RKAL). This mechanism converted audit evidence into resource decisions and made corrective action visible within routine management.

UNUJA strengthened closure through institution-wide procedures and a dual certification strategy involving ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 21001:2018, while UNIDA used the SIMUDA/SIMUTU digital environment to escalate non-conformities to university executives and the governing Board of Waqf. Despite different technical arrangements, all three cases demonstrate that audit effectiveness depends on the capacity to connect diagnosis, managerial review, corrective action, and resource allocation.

Enablers and structural constraints

Cross-site synthesis indicates that institutionalizing internal quality assurance depends on the interaction between legitimacy, organizational capacity, and operational workload. Four enabling conditions and three recurrent constraints stood out across the cases.

Enabling conditions included:

- Dual-authority leadership. Aligning pesantren spiritual authority (kyai/pengasuh) with formal academic leadership (rectors, vice-rectors, and deans) gave reforms both normative legitimacy and managerial authority.
- Normative dedication. The ethic of khidmah encouraged faculty and staff to interpret institutional duties as service to the pesantren community, strengthening commitment beyond contractual compliance.
- Digital quality infrastructure. UNIB's Iqra 9, UNUJA's SPMI portal, and UNIDA's SIMUDA/SIMUTU systems streamlined evidence collection, facilitated monitoring, and supported earlier identification of accreditation risks.

Recurrent constraints included:

- Compliance fatigue and symbolic compliance. Repeated demands for documentary evidence can shift academic attention from substantive improvement to producing

auditable records, particularly when reporting requirements are perceived as duplicative.

- Uneven digital capability. Differences in digital proficiency across staff cohorts created friction as staff moved from paper-based routines to integrated quality dashboards.
- Role overload. Lecturers in pesantren settings often combine university responsibilities with residential mentoring and community religious roles, increasing workload during intensive audit and accreditation periods.

Table 3. Analytical propositions on pesantren quality assurance and SDG 4

Proposition	Underlying Theoretical Mechanism	Expected Contribution to Higher-Education Quality
P1. Ethical legitimization	Embedding formal quality criteria in institutionally legitimate ethical concepts (e.g., itqan and amanah) reduces interpretive distance between regulation and practice.	Supports internally motivated professional accountability rather than symbolic compliance.
P2. Closed-loop linking	Coupling AMI findings with RTM, corrective action, and budgeting limits reduces policy-practice decoupling.	Increases the probability that audit evidence produces pedagogical and organizational remediation.
P3. Hybrid governance	Combining collegial academic management with pesantren spiritual authority provides reforms with managerial capacity and normative legitimacy.	Strengthens continuity, reduces resistance, and aligns strategic direction across organizational levels.
P4. Digital simplification	Integrated digital workflows reduce verification costs and improve the visibility of quality evidence.	Releases administrative capacity for academic improvement while enabling earlier identification of quality risks.

Discussion

Reframing quality assurance as ethical infrastructure

The findings complicate a purely compliance-centered reading of quality assurance in private higher education. Research has long shown that internal quality systems can oscillate between genuine quality development and added bureaucracy, depending on how institutional actors interpret and use formal procedures (Cardoso et al., 2019; Harvey, 2024). In the three pesantren-based universities, formal assurance mechanisms did not simply diffuse from the regulatory environment into organizational routines. Local moral vocabularies, leadership authority, and institutional history mediated their legitimacy. This helps explain why similar national requirements produced different organizational configurations across the sites.

This pattern is best understood as active translation rather than mechanical adoption (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Thornton et al., 2012). The cases show how abstract regulatory categories acquire operational meaning when they are connected to institutionally familiar concepts such as amanah, itqan, khidmah, and muhasabah. In this sense, pesantren values function as interpretive resources for “quality work”: they connect formal systems with situated practices, professional identities, and organizational expectations (Elken & Stensaker, 2018). The theoretical implication is that cultural embeddedness need not weaken standardization; under appropriate governance conditions, it can provide the legitimacy standards need to be internalized.

The results also extend quality-culture research by specifying the organizational mechanisms through which values become actionable. Shared ethical commitments alone are insufficient. They become consequential when coupled with tiered quality units, certified auditors, evidence systems, management review, and follow-up authority. This finding aligns with research showing that quality culture depends on aligning structural and cultural dimensions and on institutional arrangements that convert information into collective learning (Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2020; Hsu, 2023; Rahnuma, 2020). The growing use of digital dashboards further strengthens this infrastructure by reducing transaction costs and making evidence available for timely decision-making, rather than merely digitizing existing bureaucracy (Schellekens et al., 2023).

Typological divergence in pesantren-based quality culture

The cross-site comparison demonstrates that pesantren-based universities should not be treated as a homogeneous institutional category. Each case translates the same national assurance logic through a different combination of governance history, educational philosophy, and organizational technology. The three configurations therefore represent analytical types rather than a single developmental hierarchy.

1. Adaptive-Traditional Model (UNIB Situbondo). Quality improvement proceeds through gradual adaptation and consensual legitimacy. National indicators are combined with pesantren-specific academic expectations, including competence in classical Islamic texts, while change is framed by preserving valued traditions and adopting beneficial innovations.
2. Standardization-Integrative Model (UNUJA Probolinggo). Quality management functions as an organizational integrator. Unified procedures, ISO 21001:2018 and ISO 9001:2015, and digital administration create consistency across previously separate institutional units, while pesantren values provide normative coherence. The configuration illustrates how standardized management systems can be sustained when technical procedures are embedded in institutional commitment and communication (Wahid, 2019; Manatos et al., 2018).
3. Total-Integrative Model (UNIDA Gontor). Quality assurance is embedded in a comprehensive residential ecosystem in which academic learning, language, worship, discipline, and student life are governed as interconnected domains. Integrating formal standards with a 24-hour educational environment produces a quality culture that is continuously enacted rather than episodically activated for accreditation.

These configurations reinforce the importance of context-sensitive quality governance. Internal quality-assurance units are most effective when their organizational design fits institutional size, governance, and mission rather than reproducing a universal template (Erittu & Turri, 2023). More broadly, context-sensitive educational administration suggests that leadership and management technologies generate different effects depending on the institutional conditions through which they are enacted (Brauckmann et al., 2023; Hallinger, 2018; Tan, 2024). This study identifies pesantren ethical capital as one such condition and shows how it interacts with formal quality infrastructure.

Advancing SDG 4 through faith-based quality ecosystems

The findings are directly relevant to SDG 4, particularly Target 4.3 on equitable access to affordable and quality tertiary education (United Nations, 2015). Pesantren-based universities extend higher-education opportunities to communities for whom cultural proximity, religious identity, geography, and cost shape participation decisions. Their contribution to SDG 4 therefore lies not only in widening access but also in sustaining

credible academic standards within forms of higher education that remain socially legitimate to their constituencies.

The three cases illustrate that access and quality need not be treated as competing objectives. Functional internal quality systems-supported by audit capacity, closed-loop review, digital evidence, and values-based accountability-can strengthen institutional reliability while preserving distinctive educational missions. This interpretation is consistent with evidence that quality culture, integrated quality management, and systematic improvement processes are associated with stronger institutional performance and service quality (Iqbal et al., 2023; Mulay & Tandon Khanna, 2021; Nasim et al., 2020; Nugraha et al., 2023). The Contextual-Integrative Quality Pathway thus links regulatory architecture, religious-ethical capital, organizational infrastructure, and continuous improvement as mutually reinforcing components of sustainable quality education.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding: Internal quality assurance in pesantren-based private Islamic universities becomes institutionally mature when national regulatory requirements are translated through locally legitimate ethical frameworks and connected to operational systems of audit, review, corrective action, and continuous improvement. The resulting Contextual-Integrative Quality Pathway takes three forms: adaptive-traditional at UNIB, standardization-integrative at UNUJA, and total-integrative at UNIDA. **Implication:** For university leaders and quality managers, the findings indicate that technical quality architectures including ISO standards, digital dashboards, and audit systems-are more likely to drive substantive improvement when aligned with institutional values and supported by authoritative follow-up. For regulators, the findings support mission-sensitive quality assurance that maintains rigorous national standards while allowing institutions to demonstrate quality through contextually appropriate mechanisms. **Limitation:** The study examined three established universities associated with large pesantren in East Java. Transferability to smaller Islamic colleges, institutions with different resource profiles, and non-Javanese socioreligious settings should therefore be approached cautiously. The qualitative design also prioritizes institutional and managerial perspectives and does not directly estimate the longitudinal effects of quality-culture maturity on student learning or graduate outcomes. **Future Research:** Future studies should combine longitudinal qualitative evidence with quantitative indicators of learning, graduate outcomes, and organizational performance. Comparative research across smaller PTKIS, other Indonesian regions, and faith-based higher-education systems in other countries would also test the portability and boundary conditions of the Contextual-Integrative Quality Pathway.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Ahmad Fauzi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Visualization, Writing – Original Draft, and Writing - Review & Editing. **Yatim Riyanto:** Supervision, Validation, Conceptualization, and Writing - Review & Editing. **Nunuk Hariyati:** Supervision, Validation, Methodology, and Writing - Review & Editing. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of this study.

ETHICAL COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

This study followed established qualitative-research ethics. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, individual records were treated confidentially, and institutional documents were accessed with authorization. Fieldwork followed the research protocols approved by the Graduate School of Universitas Negeri Surabaya and the participating institutions.

STATEMENT ON THE USE OF AI OR DIGITAL TOOLS IN WRITING

OpenAI ChatGPT was used solely as an editorial support tool for English-language refinement, structural alignment with the JOCSIS template, and reference-format checking. It was not used to fabricate or alter empirical data, conduct fieldwork, or generate substantive findings. All AI-assisted text was critically reviewed and revised by the authors, who retain full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and interpretation of the manuscript.

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