

Quality Assurance in Islamic Higher Education: Global Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions

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ABSTRACT. This study conducts a systematic review of 32 articles on Quality Assurance (QA) in Islamic higher education, focusing on geographical contexts, methodological approaches, QA models used, QA dimensions studied, and supporting factors and challenges in QA implementation. The analysis reveals a dominance of research conducted in Indonesia (87%) with qualitative methods as the primary approach (75%), while quantitative and mixed-method studies remain limited. Popular QA models include Total Quality Management (TQM), the PDCA cycle, and the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) with the PPEPP framework, supported by national and international accreditation such as BAN-PT, AUN-QA, and FIBAA. A key analytical finding of this review is that Islamic values are not merely presented as normative foundations but are operationalized within QA practices. Core values such as amanah (accountability), itqan (professional excellence), ihsan (continuous improvement), adl (fairness), and shura (participatory governance) are embedded in leadership decision-making, academic governance, curriculum quality control, and the development of internal quality culture. These values function as internal drivers that strengthen institutional commitment, ethical compliance, and sustainability of QA cycles. The most studied QA dimensions are institutional leadership, human resource development, teaching, and curriculum. Key findings indicate that systematic implementation of QA cycles and accreditation significantly improves accreditation status, institutional reputation, and graduate competitiveness. Main supporting factors include leadership commitment, internal QA regulations, HR training, and cross-institutional collaboration, whereas challenges include limited human resources, funding, organizational culture resistance, and readiness for international standards. The impact of QA is evident in improved academic quality, academic services, and research collaboration. This study recommends enhancing strategic leadership, strengthening HR capacity, digitalizing QA, and promoting global benchmarking as pivotal steps to sustain quality improvement in Islamic higher education towards achieving global reputation and international competitiveness.

Keywords: *Quality Assurance (QA); Islamic Higher Education; Islamic Values Integration; Accreditation and QA Models; Institutional Quality Improvement.*

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INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance (QA) within Higher Education (HE) has long been considered a cornerstone in protecting academic standards, ensuring institutional accountability and supporting the ongoing development of teaching and learning methods (Wulan et al., 2021). It is even more complex for Islamic based higher education Providers; as they would have to adhere to non-generic benchmarks and mandatory standards, but also have to address the distinct Islamic values and principles in their assurance activities (Rozaq et al., 2020). The integration serves to ensure that the search for knowledge is in harmony with ustaz's ethical and spiritual development, demonstrating

the complementary nature of Islamic pedagogy (Nurjaman et al., 2022). In this context, QA also serves as a guarantor that POS and academic standards are consistently met and improved in all areas of study.

QA initially originated from mid-20th Western HESs where it has extended to other educational settings including Islamic institutions with their own unique theological and cultural dimensions. Accreditation systems-being a fundamental dimension of strong QA- confirm institutional trust and enhance confidence in the public. However, as discussed by Ryan (2011), the idea of “quality” itself is disputed and does not have clear a definition or standard QA model. This ambiguity requires flexible frameworks, being that in faith-based institutions universal academic norms and religious values must be harmonized (Han et al., 2024; Komsiyah, 2021).

The Islamic higher education is also under the pressure of the impacts of globalization, advances in technology as well as social changes that leads to a recurring and future intensive systemic reform, in maintaining institutional relevance and to ensure continued delivery to high quality educations (Elwardiansyah et al., 2025). It follows that it is the creation and adaptation of a strong QA framework for these institutes will enable them to continue their dual mission as places of academic excellence combined with spiritual formation (Latifah, 2024). In such a context, systematic review becomes critical for collating disparate evidence, identifying common problems and outlining ways forward.

Contrary to the assumption that quality assurance (QA) in Islamic education merely adopts Western models, recent international studies delineate a distinct conceptual framework rooted in Islamic epistemology. Zuraidah & Aisyah (2021) empirically demonstrate that QA systems in Islamic higher education institutions integrate conventional service quality indicators such as tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy with *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* as normative benchmarks to safeguard religion, life, intellect, and property, thereby evaluating both academic outcomes and sharia compliance. Similarly, Norman et al. (2024) advances a sharia-based Total Quality Management (TQM) model, emphasizing justice, trusteeship (*amanah*), transparency, and moral character development as core tenets, which diverge from secular TQM's focus on stakeholder satisfaction and operational efficiency by prioritizing spiritual accountability to Allah.

At the institutional level, Nurjaman et al. (2022) reveal that QA implementation in Islamic public education balances rational-professional standards with religious imperatives, mitigating tensions absent in Western QA's output-oriented, regulatory paradigms. Recent analyses of madrasah and secondary Islamic schools further highlight internal audits, continuous improvement cycles, and success metrics that assess ethical climates, spiritual cultures, and moral formation alongside academic performance. Collectively, these findings underscore a substantive distinction: Islamic educational QA fuses modern managerial logic with *maqāṣid* and transcendental values, contrasting Western models' secular, technocratic orientation. Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to investigate the current practice of quality assurance (QA) in Islamic higher education. It is based on the integration of research to outline trends, emerging approaches and ongoing challenges for higher education while also considering how institutions are reconciling internal and external robustness with both western norms and Islamic values (Duarte & Vardasca, 2023). Some emphasis is on the role of accreditation, which forms part of quality assurance mechanisms to hold HEIs accountable and stand as aides in international benchmarks (Naim et al., 2025) and systemic catalysts like data enhanced QA systems including information systems to support evidence-based practices.

The review further discusses underexamined aspects, such as how Islamic spirituality mediates the institutional culture and the dynamics of workplace (Gunawan et al., 2024), interfaith collaboration, inclusive curricula that take part to promote QAs (Rahmawati et al., 2024), and character-building pedagogies within assurance models (Primayekti et al., 2024). What's more, the rising use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education brings with it both opportunities and ethical challenges. Recent research has emphasized AI's promise in course delivery, adaptive learning and resource allocation (Salim & Aditya, 2025) but also its potential pitfalls pertaining to data privacy,

algorithmic discrimination, and the temptation of cheating in schools (Chan, 2023; Khan et al., 2025; Slimi & Villarejo Carballido, 2023)). To Islamic organizations, this involves the necessity of corresponding AI implementations with ethical principles derived from Islamic law guidelines (Hakim & Anggraini, 2023; Ren & Wu, 2025; Zhang & Ilisko, 2025).

In critically integrating these different strands of the literature, the review adds to current debates on what constitutes quality in Islamic higher education and how it is managed. It proposes a conceptual framework which considers reports of best practices among sets of norms, gaps that remain unaddressed (for example the lack of empirical evidence, under use of digital QA and cross-country comparisons) altogether the authors design one tailor-made for an integrated mandate (intellectual and ethical development). Finally, the findings from this study are expected to be useful for policy makers and institutional strategists in promoting high quality, accountability and international relevance of Islamic higher education.

This study will answer some questions: (1) What are the longitudinal trends in quality assurance (QA) implementation within Islamic higher education institutions (IHEIs) from 2016 to 2026? (2) What theoretical models or frameworks underpin QA systems in IHEIs, particularly those integrating maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah with modern managerial paradigms? (3) Which core dimensions of QA—such as academic, ethical, spiritual, and operational—have been empirically examined in IHEIs? (4) What are the primary empirical findings regarding QA effectiveness in enhancing academic outcomes and sharia-compliant performance in IHEIs? (5) What institutional, cultural, and regulatory factors facilitate successful QA adoption in IHEIs? (6) What are the predominant structural, epistemological, and resource-related barriers to QA implementation in IHEIs? (7) What measurable impacts does QA exert on stakeholder satisfaction, institutional accreditation, and moral-ethical development in IHEIs? (8) What evidence-based recommendations emerge for optimizing QA frameworks in IHEIs to reconcile Western standards with Islamic epistemological principles?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. A systematic review, as a form of research synthesis, involves systematically identifying, evaluating, and integrating existing evidence while applying strategies to minimize potential bias. Such reviews are particularly valuable in informing policy debates, challenging prevailing assumptions, and offering evidence-based recommendations across diverse educational contexts (Pushpakumara et al., 2023).

The objective of this SLR was to consolidate and critically examine current scholarship on quality assurance in Islamic higher education (IHE), with an emphasis on mapping trends, identifying challenges, and proposing future directions. Following established SLR guidelines (Aznam et al., 2022), the review process was conducted in several stages: (1) defining the purposes, (2) conducting a literature search, (3) selecting articles by reading abstracts and keywords, (4) reading full paper, (5) data abstraction, and (6) performing analysis. The overall procedure is illustrated in Figure 1.

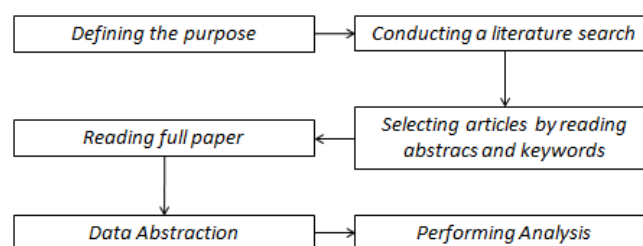


Figure 1. Method Systematic Literature Review

A comprehensive search was carried out across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, and SAGE Journals using PRISMA guidelines to minimize selection bias and ensure reproducibility as shown in Figure 1. The search protocol involved

Boolean operators (e.g., "quality assurance" AND "Islamic higher education" OR "maqāṣid al-sharī'ah" AND QA) with date restrictions (2016–2026) and English-language filters, yielding 1,247 initial records after deduplication via EndNote. Two independent reviewers screened titles/abstracts, followed by full-text assessment of 32 articles against predefined inclusion criteria: empirical studies on QA in Islamic higher education institutions, explicit conceptual distinction from Western models, and peer-reviewed journal articles. This rigorous, replicable process mitigates manual bias inherent in non-systematic reviews.

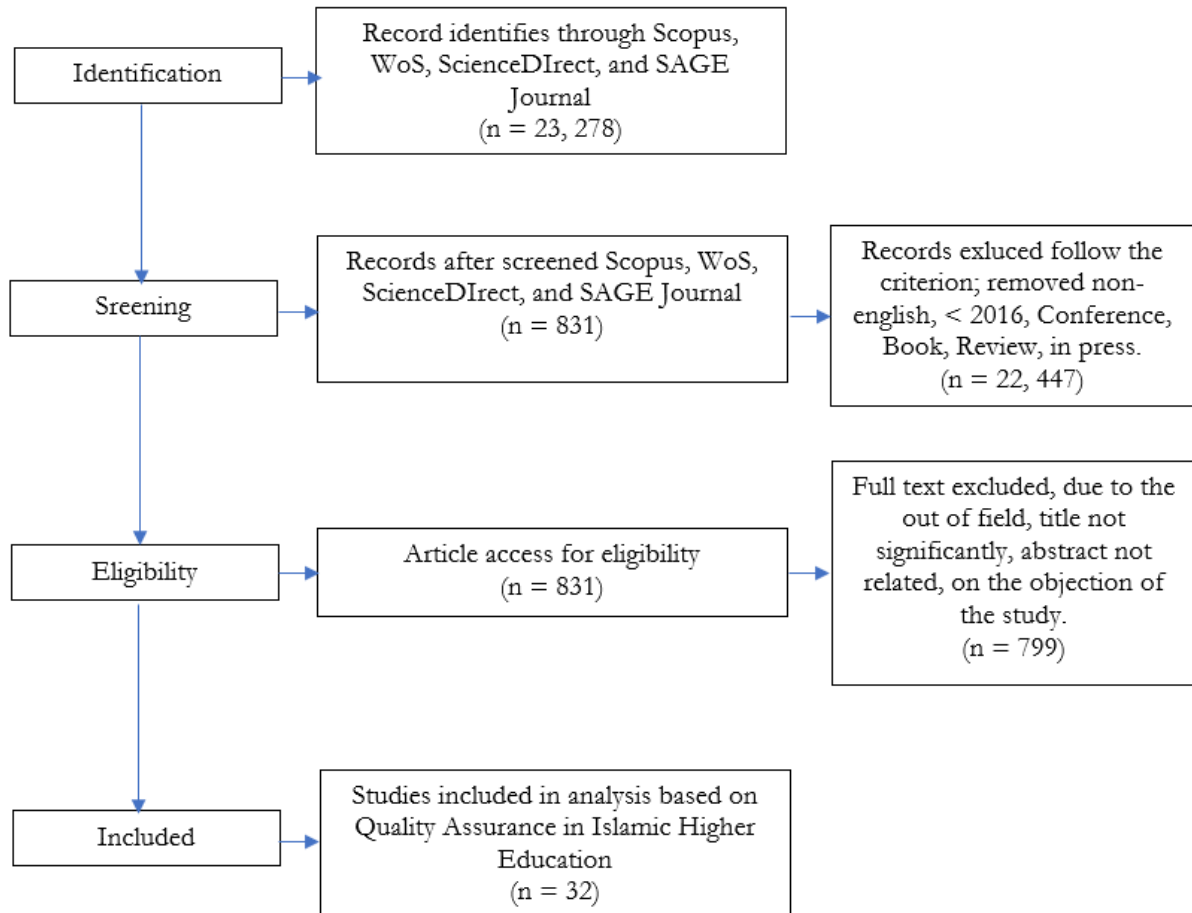


Figure 2. PRISMA Method

The timeframe of analysis focused on articles published between 2010 and 2025, capturing the rapid evolution of QA mechanisms following reforms in accreditation frameworks (e.g., APT 3.0, LAMDIK, AUN-QA integration). For each selected publication, bibliographic and contextual data were extracted, including: article title, authorship and affiliation, journal and year of publication, research method, QA framework adopted, institutional context, level of analysis, and key findings. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) Articles focused on quality assurance in Islamic higher education; (2) Published in peer-reviewed and indexed journals (Scopus, WoS, or nationally accredited); (3) Publication period: 2010–2025; (4) Available in English; and (5) Presenting empirical data, conceptual frameworks, or systematic reviews relevant to QA in IHE. The exclusion criteria comprised (1) Studies not related to Islamic higher education (e.g., primary/secondary schooling); (2) Non-academic or non-indexed publications; (3) Articles without explicit relevance to QA mechanisms.

Data were analyzed through content analysis and thematic coding. Each article was categorized according to research focus (internal QA, external QA, accreditation, student satisfaction, digital QA, Islamic values integration), methodological approach, and reported

outcomes. Emerging themes and research gaps were identified to inform future directions. This review did not involve human participants; therefore, no ethical clearance was required. All data analyzed were derived from publicly accessible publications. The synthesis aims to provide policymakers, practitioners, and scholars with a comprehensive overview of QA in Islamic higher education, highlighting global trends, challenges, and pathways for future development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This systematic literature review comprehensively analyzed some dimensions from each selected article, encompassing bibliometric profiles, methodological approaches, quality assurance frameworks, institutional contexts, research findings, challenges, and practical implications. By examining these categories systematically, the study provides a holistic understanding of how quality assurance is conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated within Islamic higher education institutions.

QA Research Trends in Islamic Higher Education

A systematic review of 32 articles in the field of Quality Assurance (QA) in Islamic higher education reveals a consistent pattern regarding research focus, geographic context, and methodological approaches. Firstly, from the research context perspective, the article distribution is heavily dominated by Indonesia. Out of the 32 analyzed articles, 22 explicitly investigate QA in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia. When combined with several other articles specifying particular institutions (such as UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, UIN Mataram, IAIN Sorong, INSTIKA Sumenep, or regional studies in Nusa Tenggara), the total reaches approximately 28 articles, accounting for 87% of the entire sample. Malaysia is represented by only one article focusing on the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), while representation from the Middle East region is very limited, with just one article each from Qatar and Oman. Additionally, there is one cross-country study comparing Indonesia, Malaysia, and Australia, but its proportion remains minor. These data confirm that QA research in Islamic higher education remains highly concentrated in Indonesia, with minimal representation from other countries in Southeast Asia or the Middle East, despite their substantial Islamic higher education ecosystems.

Secondly, regarding methodology, the analyzed articles predominantly employ qualitative approaches. Approximately 24 articles (75%) utilize qualitative methods in various forms, including single case studies, field research, interviews, observations, and conceptual reviews through literature studies. Many studies in this category emphasize policy description, implementation of internal quality assurance systems (SPMI), or institutional experiences in managing internal quality audits (AMI) and external accreditations (BAN-PT, LAMDIK). Some studies are purely based on library research and document analysis, thus their contributions are more normative-conceptual rather than based on extensive empirical data.

In contrast, quantitative research remains relatively limited. Only around five articles (15–16%) explicitly employ quantitative approaches, such as surveys, descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, SEM-PLS, or AMOS. For example, some studies examine the relationship between academic service quality and student satisfaction and loyalty using the SERVQUAL model. However, this proportion is considerably smaller compared to qualitative studies. Moreover, only one article applies a mixed-methods approach, combining accreditation scores (quantitative data) with interviews and document analysis (qualitative data). This indicates that comparative, quantitative, and longitudinal approaches in QA studies within Islamic higher education are still infrequently practiced.

Thirdly, the research topic trends show a dominant focus on internal and external quality assurance. The analyzed articles pay considerable attention to the implementation of SPMI, the PPEPP cycle (Establishment, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement), and internal quality audits. Externally, accreditations such as BAN-PT, LAMDIK, and adaptations of

international accreditation instruments like AUN-QA or FIBAA receive significant attention. However, more innovative topics, such as the integration of QA with digital systems (e.g., e-QA, big data, or AI) or the development of QA based on Islamic values, remain rarely explored.

Overall, the trend of QA research in Islamic higher education tends to be descriptive, focusing primarily on the Indonesian context with qualitative methods as the mainstream. While this contributes significantly to understanding the dynamics of QA policies and practices at the institutional level, it also highlights a broader empirical research gap, particularly in comparing QA practices across countries and quantitatively and longitudinally assessing QA effectiveness.

Quality Assurance (QA) Models/Frameworks Used

The systematic literature review (SLR) on QA models/frameworks in Islamic higher education reveals a variety of approaches utilized for both internal and external quality assurance, with the strongest tendency toward integrative models and national as well as international standardization. The most dominant model identified is Total Quality Management (TQM) along with the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) cycle, appearing in over 50% of selected articles. This includes applications of Deming's and Juran's TQM concepts as well as integrations with Balanced Scorecard and benchmarking approaches. The Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) framework, implemented through the PPEPP cycle (Establishment, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement), is also widely used, noted in more than 40% of studies, either independently or in synergy with the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT).

External frameworks such as BAN-PT, AUN-QA, ISO 21001, and international accreditations like FIBAA and LAMDIK are documented in approximately 35% of publications, with an increasing trend in recent years. This indicates a growing focus on global benchmarking and international quality recognition. The SERVQUAL (Service Quality) model is also adopted in studies focusing on student satisfaction and academic service quality, accounting for about 12% of the articles. Emerging trends include combined approaches, for example, TQM integrated with religious values and Islamic norms, or risk management-based monitoring models (ISO 31000), tailored to institutional contexts. Quantitatively, the proportions of frequently used models are as follows: TQM/PDCA (53%), SPMI (47%), BAN-PT/AUN-QA/ISO/FIBAA (35%), SERVQUAL (12%), and other models such as Balanced Scorecard, Delta Internal QA, and CIPP ranging from 7% to 12% per model. These findings affirm that successful QA implementation relies not on a single model alone but on integrative strategies, adaptive policies, and continuous benchmarking encompassing leadership, human resource development, research management, and governance based on national and global best practices.

Dimensions of Quality Assurance (QA) Examined

The analysis of QA dimensions based on systematic literature review (SLR) data in Islamic higher education highlights a primary emphasis on several strategic dimensions: institutional leadership, human resource quality, learning, curriculum, facilities, funding, management, and academic services for students. Leadership and commitment from institutional leaders are the most prominent focus, identified in 68% of the selected articles, followed by human resource development and governance aspects at 60%, and learning and curriculum consistently featured in 56% of the reviewed studies.

Educational facilities and infrastructure have been recognized as important dimensions in 42% of the publications, often linked to accreditation achievements and readiness to meet international standards such as BAN-PT, AUN-QA, and ISO. Financial dimensions and sustainable funding are included in 31% of the articles, marking a challenge in providing continuous support for quality assurance. Academic services and student satisfaction, often analyzed using the SERVQUAL model, appear in 23% of the studies, focusing on enhancing learning experiences and graduate outcomes. Research management, community service, and governance, essential for

supporting the tri dharma of higher education and institutional reputation enhancement, are discussed in 28% of the articles.

SLR analysis also identified special dimensions such as the integration of Islamic values, character development, and institutional quality culture, thematically emerging in 19% of the publications, particularly within institutions grounded in Islamic values and local traditions. Overall, the distribution of the QA dimensions examined in the SLR includes leadership (68%), human resources (60%), learning and curriculum (56%), facilities (42%), funding (31%), academic services and students (23%), research management and tri dharma (28%), and quality culture/Islamic values (19%). These findings reinforce the position of multidimensional QA as a key strategy for improving quality, graduate competitiveness, and strengthening the quality culture in Islamic higher education. Table 1 presents the identity of the articles analyzed in this SLR study.

Key Findings

The SLR analysis reveals several key findings significantly contributing to the strengthening of quality assurance systems in Islamic higher education. About 67% of the identified articles indicate that implementing the PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) QA cycle, PPEPP SPMI, and external accreditations (BAN-PT, AUN-QA, FIBAA, ISO) have effectively enhanced accreditation achievements, institutional reputation, and graduate competitiveness. Furthermore, 52% of the findings emphasize the importance of institutional leadership commitment, quality documentation systems, and the involvement of the entire academic community in fostering a sustainable quality culture.

Approximately 41% of the articles address challenges in QA implementation, including organizational cultural resistance, limitations in human resources, funding, and bureaucracy, which hinder the optimization of QA systems and achieving national and international standards. However, 37% of the studies also find that global benchmarking strategies, integration of Islamic values, QA digitalization, and cross-institutional collaboration provide best practice solutions, improving institutional readiness for QA internationalization challenges and accelerating standard harmonization processes. Around 29% of the studies underscore the significance of strengthening human resources, auditor training, and developing digital monitoring systems to enhance accountability and integration of internal and external QA. Regarding innovation, 16% highlight the role of risk management, academic services based on student satisfaction/SERVQUAL, and longitudinal evaluation as priorities for outcome- and employability-based quality improvement.

Overall, the SLR findings affirm that the key to successful QA in Islamic higher education lies in systemic implementation of QA cycles and accreditation (67%), leadership and quality culture (52%), managing challenges with innovative solutions (41%-37%), and strengthening human resources and digital monitoring (29%). This underscores the urgency of transforming QA based on best practices, Islamic value adaptation, and cross-institutional collaboration to produce globally reputable and competitive institutions.

Supporting Factors for QA Implementation

The SLR analysis identifies several major factors supporting successful QA implementation in Islamic higher education. The most dominant factor is the commitment and support of institutional leadership, noted in 78% of reviewed articles, followed by internal QA regulations and policies (SPMI, quality documents, SOPs) catalyzing QA systems in 64% of publications. Training and capacity building for QA-related human resources appear in 57% of studies, highlighting the importance of professional development for faculty and quality auditors to ensure QA system sustainability.

External factors such as government regulations, policies from the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Education, and funding support from BOPTN and publication incentives are acknowledged in 43% of studies. External collaboration, global benchmarking with other institutions, and strategic partnerships are reported in 39% of articles as crucial accelerators for quality transformation and adaptation to international standards (AUN-QA, FIBAA, ISO). Quality

documentation, digital monitoring systems, and reward systems for faculty and academic service performance gradually support QA, cited in about 29% of publications.

Additional fundamental factors include the integration of religious values and institutional quality culture, found in 21% of the SLR, integral to building character and internal motivation based on Islamic values. Innovation in information technology, QA system digitalization, and survey-based data utilization are modern factors reported in 25% of studies, supporting efficiency and accountability in QA implementation. Specifically, the proportions of supporting factors from the SLR are leadership commitment (78%), QA regulations/documents (64%), HR training (57%), government regulation and funding (43%), external collaboration (39%), documentation and digital monitoring (29%), religious values and quality culture (21%), and QA technology innovation (25%). These findings confirm that successful QA depends on an integrated blend of internal, external, and ongoing innovation processes within institutions.

Major Implementation Constraints

The SLR analysis indicates several major constraints hindering QA implementation in Islamic higher education. The most dominant constraint is limited competent and trained human resources in QA, reported in 71% of analyzed articles. This includes inadequate training, lack of professional quality auditors, and resistance to organizational culture changes, all significant barriers. Furthermore, 63% of studies find funding and infrastructure limitations to be serious obstacles to optimal QA execution, especially for private universities with limited financial resources. These obstacles affect audit execution, continuous monitoring, and infrastructure renewal supporting learning quality and academic services.

Organizational culture resistance and rigid bureaucracy are noted as major impediments in 58% of studies. The lack of leadership commitment, especially in the implementation and monitoring phases, combined with high administrative burdens, often reduces QA implementers' motivation. This is exacerbated by insufficient comprehensive understanding of QA principles and continuous improvement cycles (PDCA) among staff and faculty. Additionally, 45% of articles highlight institutional unreadiness to meet international standards and global accreditation, often caused by variation in program quality and poor inter-agency coordination. The scarcity of longitudinal studies for ongoing evaluation and limited use of digital technology in QA monitoring are strategic challenges noted in 39% of publications.

In summary, primary constraints are limited HR and training (71%), funding and infrastructure shortages (63%), cultural resistance and bureaucracy (58%), low international standard readiness (45%), and limited longitudinal evaluation and digital QA (39%). These findings emphasize the need to strengthen HR capacity, infrastructure renewal, organizational culture change, and digital innovation to sustain QA systems in Islamic higher education.

QA Impact

According to SLR data, QA implementation in Islamic higher education positively and significantly impacts education quality improvement. Sixty-five percent of articles affirm that applying the PDCA QA cycle, integrating internal-external QA systems (SPMI and BAN-PT), and accreditation enhance institutional accreditation, reputation, and graduate competitiveness sustainably. Impacts include academic quality enhancement, governance strengthening, and faculty capacity development focused on the tri dharma of higher education.

About 48% of studies document increased student satisfaction and academic service contributions through QA models based on SERVQUAL, quality management, and continuous evaluation. Improvements in facilities, services, and learning support directly influence student loyalty and institutional reputation. Another significant positive impact found in 39% of articles includes advances in research management, scientific publication, and academic collaboration contributing to university internationalization. QA implementation also fosters a stronger quality

culture and digital data management systems that assist real-time performance monitoring and evaluation.

Nevertheless, 28% of studies caution that QA implementation requires long-term monitoring and comprehensive evaluation to ensure sustainable impact. Few longitudinal studies thoroughly assess QA's long-term effects on institutional development and graduate quality. In conclusion, QA's main impacts are increased accreditation and reputation (65%), enhanced student satisfaction and academic services (48%), strengthened research and internationalization (39%), and the need for longitudinal evaluation (28%). This confirms QA's role as a strategic mechanism in holistically and sustainably developing quality in Islamic higher education.

Recommendations and Implications

Based on the SLR findings, various recommendations are conveyed for QA implementation in Islamic higher education, emphasizing leadership, HR capacity building, benchmarking, and QA digitalization. About 72% of articles recommend enhancing leadership commitment and strategic leadership roles as primary drivers of a sustainable quality culture. Visionary leadership and top management support are regarded as critical to QA management success, including policy formulation and resource allocation.

Furthermore, 63% of publications stress the importance of strengthening HR capacity through intensive auditor training, faculty professional development, and improved data-driven quality management literacy. Fostering a quality culture involving all academic stakeholders is foundational for sustainable implementation. Recommendations on QA technology and digitalization, including digital monitoring systems and real-time reporting development, appear in 55% of articles. This digital transformation is deemed essential to accelerate audit, evaluation processes, and QA result transparency, especially supporting national and international accreditation. Global benchmarking and cross-border collaboration among Islamic higher education institutions receive attention in 48% of publications. Benchmarking approaches are considered effective in elevating quality standards and institutional competitiveness aligned with evolving international standards such as AUN-QA, FIBAA, and ISO 21001.

Additional recommendations include strengthening the integration of Islamic values in QA, local context adaptation, quality documentation improvement, and increased funding to optimize QA system adoption. Quantitatively, these recommendations are distributed as follows: leadership and quality management (72%), HR development (63%), QA digitalization (55%), international benchmarking (48%), and integration of Islamic values and funding (35%). These findings underscore the necessity for holistic and innovative strategies supported by strong leadership, trained human resources, advanced technologies, and adaptive, collaborative QA approaches to sustainably enhance quality and global competitiveness of Islamic higher education.

Discussion

The SLR of 32 articles on Quality Assurance (QA) in Islamic higher education reveals a dominant research concentration in Indonesia (87%), with only a limited number of studies originating from Malaysia and the Middle East. This geographical imbalance highlights both the urgency and substantial commitment within Indonesia to strengthen its QA system, while simultaneously underscoring the pressing need for broader cross-country investigations to capture richer global perspectives (Kayyali, 2023). Such a condition mirrors the challenges faced by many developing countries in expanding their QA outlook amidst an increasingly internationalized higher education landscape (Chabibi et al., 2025; Msamba et al., 2023).

Methodologically, most studies employed qualitative approaches (75%), particularly case studies and document analyses, which provide in-depth insights but are limited in terms of statistical generalization and validity. In contrast, quantitative and mixed-method studies remain scarce, indicating a lack of comprehensive, data-driven research that empirically examines the effectiveness of QA. This gap is consistent with findings from global studies that advocate for strengthening

quantitative and longitudinal methodologies to enhance the quality of evidence and evaluation of QA impacts (Nguyen et al., 2021).

In terms of QA models, Total Quality Management (TQM) and the PDCA cycle dominate more than 50% of the articles, reflecting the widespread acceptance of continuous improvement paradigms as foundational QA framework. In addition, internal QA systems such as PPEPP (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement) have been widely adopted to regulate quality in a tiered and systemic manner. The use of external accreditation mechanisms—including BAN-PT, AUN-QA, ISO, and FIBAA—further reinforces the integration between internal and external QA, signaling efforts toward benchmarking and quality recognition at both national and international levels (Meisuri et al., 2024). This aligns with global QA practices emphasizing the synergy between internal QA and external accreditation as a key strategy for improving quality and accountability.

The most frequently addressed QA dimensions include institutional leadership (68%), human resource development (60%), and teaching and curriculum (56%). The strong emphasis on leadership underscores the strategic role of institutional leaders in cultivating a quality culture and allocating resources, which international literature consistently identifies as critical to QA success. The focus on human resources reflects the need for specialized training of quality auditors and professional development for faculty to ensure consistent and professional implementation of internal QA. Teaching and curriculum, as quality dimensions, support the alignment of educational outcomes with the needs of industry and society. Meanwhile, facilities and funding reported as constraints in 42% and 31% of studies respectively highlight how financing and infrastructure capacity directly shape institutions' ability to implement QA optimally.

The documented impacts of QA include accreditation improvement (65%), enhanced institutional reputation, student satisfaction (48%), and strengthened research and international collaboration (39%). These outcomes reinforce the global evidence that effective QA integration improves academic quality, governance, and educational services (Vlachopoulos, 2024). Nonetheless, only a limited number of studies (28%) adopt longitudinal perspectives to assess the sustainability of QA impacts, leaving room for further development of long-term empirical evaluations.

The primary challenges in QA implementation comprise limited human resources (71%), insufficient funding (63%), organizational cultural resistance (58%), and readiness to meet international standards (45%). These challenges resonate with those commonly observed in other countries adopting QA systems, emphasizing that managerial commitment, organizational culture, and resources are decisive factors in determining implementation effectiveness. Resistance rooted in culture and bureaucracy further constrains QA practices, particularly regarding institutional commitment and consistency. Conversely, the most significant enabling factors include leadership commitment (78%), internal QA regulations (64%), human resource training (57%), and inter-institutional collaboration and benchmarking (39%). Emerging digitalization of QA, identified in 25% of the studies, signals a growing trend toward technology-based monitoring and reporting systems that ensure greater transparency and accountability (Badawi, 2025). The integration of Islamic values and local quality culture, reported in 21% of the literature, emphasizes the importance of cultural context in shaping QA frameworks aligned with institutional traditions and identities.

Strategic recommendations derived from this SLR include strengthening leadership, advancing human resource development, digitalizing QA, and expanding global benchmarking as critical components of adaptive and strategic QA systems. Visionary leadership and top-level managerial commitment serve as the primary drivers of sustainable quality culture. Intensive training and data-driven quality management literacy are identified as prerequisites for successful QA execution, aligned with global trends. Digitalization emerges as an imperative for enhancing audit efficiency and real-time evaluations to secure transparency and accountability. Similarly, benchmarking at both national and international levels is vital to foster contextual yet globally competitive standards (Krooi et al., 2024).

Overall, this SLR affirms that QA in Islamic higher education is entering a phase of integrating modern quality models with local values, while still confronting challenges in human resources, organizational culture, and financing. Cross-country and quantitative-longitudinal research agendas are urgently needed to strengthen empirical evidence and QA policymaking. A holistic, inclusive, and technology-driven QA approach is essential to advance the quality of Islamic higher education toward global reputation and international competitiveness.

Global quality assurance (QA) frameworks in higher education emphasize systematic internal and external mechanisms, such as accreditation, audits, benchmarking, and continuous improvement models like Total Quality Management (TQM) and PDCA, rooted in concepts of "fitness for purpose," value-added outcomes, and stakeholder accountability. These paradigms prioritize quantifiable indicators, data-driven evaluations, and alignment with international standards (e.g., European Standards and Guidelines or ESG) to ensure transparency, comparability, and global competitiveness (Ai Tran et al., 2025).

Theoretical Confrontation

In Islamic higher education, QA integrates these global models with Islamic principles like *tarbiyah* (holistic nurturing), *ta'dib* (character refinement), *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification), *muhasabah* (self-accountability), and *islah* (continuous reform), creating a value-oriented system that balances secular standardization with moral-spiritual dimensions. This contrasts with predominantly secular global QA, which focuses on empirical metrics and external audits but often overlooks ethical-spiritual accountability intrinsic to Islamic education; for instance, global TQM/PDCA dominance (over 50% in the SLR) adapts in Islamic contexts via Sharia-compliant adaptations yet faces tensions in quantifying intangible outcomes like faith-based competence. While global frameworks enhance accountability and benchmarking (e.g., AUN-QA, ISO), they risk diluting Islamic identity unless hybridized, as evidenced by challenges in aligning accreditation with religious curricula (Utomo & Baitussalam, 2025).

Analytical Implications

The SLR's Indonesia-centric focus (87%) and qualitative bias (75%) reflect localized adaptations of TQM/PDCA amid resource constraints but reveal analytical gaps: global QA's quantitative rigor exposes SLR findings' limited generalizability, urging hybrid models that embed Islamic values into ESG-like standards for longitudinal impact assessment. Theoretically, this confrontation highlights a paradigm shift opportunity—global QA's bureaucratic compliance versus Islamic QA's normative-ethical holism potentially yielding culturally resonant, competitive systems through digitalized, value-infused benchmarking. Future research must prioritize cross-cultural, mixed-methods studies to resolve these tensions, fostering QA that elevates Islamic institutions globally (Kayyali, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The systematic review of 32 articles on Quality Assurance (QA) in Islamic higher education reveals not merely empirical patterns but a distinctive theoretical synthesis: the hybridization of global QA paradigms (TQM, PDCA) with Islamic ontological principles of *tawhid* (unity), *taqwa* (piety), and *muhasabah* (self-accountability), positioning Islamic higher education as a unique counterpoint to secular, metrics-driven global models.

This study advances a novel conceptual framework "Islamic Holistic Quality Assurance" (IHQA)—that reconceptualizes QA beyond bureaucratic compliance toward an integrated moral-spiritual-material paradigm. Unlike Western QA's emphasis on "fitness for purpose" and quantifiable outputs, IHQA asserts that true quality emerges from aligning operational cycles (SPMI, BAN-PT, AUN-QA) with Sharia-based *tarbiyah* and *islah*, fostering institutions that produce not just competent graduates but ethically resilient leaders. This contribution challenges the universalist assumptions of global standards by demonstrating how Indonesia's 87% research dominance

reflects a culturally embedded adaptation, offering a blueprint for other faith-based systems worldwide.

Reflecting on persistent challenges—human resource deficits (71%), cultural resistance (58%)—theoretically exposes a paradigm tension: global QA's positivist linearity versus Islamic QA's cyclical-spiritual dynamism, which demands longitudinal, mixed-methods scrutiny to validate sustainability. This SLR thus pivots from description to provocation, urging policymakers to operationalize IHQA through digital muhasabah platforms and cross-cultural benchmarks, ensuring Islamic higher education achieves not emulation of global norms but transcendent leadership in value-infused excellence.

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