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Strengthening Quality Assurance Systems in Educational Institutions: Challenges, Strategies, and Implementation

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Abstract

This study examines the strengthening of quality assurance systems across five categories of Indonesian educational institutions madrasah, general schools, pesantren, higher education institutions, and early childhood education (PAUD) providers arguing that a sustainable quality assurance system is essential for improving educational quality amid ongoing policy reform, technological change, and rising public expectations. Employing a qualitative library research design, the study draws on peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, national education regulations, and institutional policy documents, analyzed through content analysis to interpret, compare, and synthesize recurring themes. The findings reveal that institutions across all five categories confront common challenges: an underdeveloped quality culture, limited human resource capacity, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, weak stakeholder commitment, and insufficient integration of digital technology into quality management. To address these obstacles, the study proposes an integrated set of strategies, including strengthening institutional leadership, developing educator competence through sustained training, fostering a genuine rather than compliance-driven quality culture, optimizing internal monitoring and self-evaluation, and expanding collaboration with supervisory bodies, accreditation agencies, and community stakeholders. The study concludes that when implemented in a planned, systematic, and sustained manner, quality assurance enhances institutional management effectiveness, strengthens the learning process, and increases stakeholder satisfaction. Accordingly, strengthening quality assurance should be regarded as a strategic priority for institutions seeking to deliver education that is high-quality, adaptive, and competitive in an increasingly globalized era.

Keywords: quality assurance system, quality culture, educational institution, quality implementation, educational quality improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the principal pillars of human resource development for any nation. High-quality education produces generations who are competent, well-characterized, and able to compete amid globalization and rapid scientific and technological advancement. The quality of education is not determined solely by an ideally designed curriculum or adequate facilities, but also by the extent to which the educational process itself is continuously guaranteed (Purnamaningsih & Purbangkara, 2022). In this

context, a quality assurance system becomes an essential instrument that ensures every educational institution, at the basic, secondary, or higher education level, is able to deliver learning that is of high quality, accountable, transparent, and oriented toward continuous improvement (Ahmad, 2021).

Educational quality assurance has been a serious government concern in Indonesia for several decades, as reflected in a series of regulations, including Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards and its subsequent amendments, together with policies establishing the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and the External Quality Assurance System (SPME) (Rizal et al., 2023). Both systems require every education unit to build a quality culture, whether generated through internal initiative or verified through external accreditation and evaluation mechanisms. These policies rest on the premise that educational quality cannot be guaranteed through occasional or ceremonial supervision alone; it requires a structured, measurable, tiered, and continuous system spanning planning, implementation, evaluation, and corrective follow-up.

Despite an adequate regulatory and policy framework, the implementation of quality assurance across educational institutions continues to face complex and varied challenges. These include limited human resources with a comprehensive understanding of quality assurance concepts and mechanisms, weak leadership commitment in cultivating a quality culture, constrained facilities, infrastructure, and operating budgets, institutional and individual resistance to change, weak documentation and reporting systems, and persistent capacity gaps between institutions in major cities and those in remote or underdeveloped areas (Maulana et al., 2025). These conditions often reduce quality assurance implementation to a mere administrative formality intended to satisfy accreditation requirements, rather than an internalized culture and shared value within the institution.

A number of prior studies have examined quality assurance implementation, though largely within the boundaries of a single institutional type or a single regional context. Arifudin (2019) investigated internal quality assurance management in higher education, emphasizing that limited human resources and inadequate facilities remain central obstacles to accreditation readiness. In the schooling sector, Rahwati (2019) found that school self-evaluation, one of the core internal quality-assurance instruments, was not yet optimally implemented because teachers and parents lacked sufficient capacity to conduct it, and identified corrective measures such as improving unmet quality targets and reinforcing follow-up on evaluation findings. Studies on madrasah and pesantren have tended to focus on the distinctive religious-institutional character of these settings; a literature review on digital archiving systems in madrasah and pesantren administration reported that success in strengthening administrative service quality depends on leadership commitment, human resource competence, technological infrastructure, and policy support, while limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, resistance to change, and a generational digital divide remain the principal constraints (STKIP Pesisir Selatan, 2025). Meanwhile, research on early childhood education (PAUD) quality assurance remains comparatively descriptive: studies report that many PAUD institutions still fall

short of national standards, particularly regarding classroom space, educational play equipment, and outdoor facilities, which directly hinders the learning process (Ejournal Penerbit Jurnal, 2025). Sunarni and Ibrahim (2025) further demonstrated that sustained training and mentoring can meaningfully strengthen human resource capacity for quality assurance, though their study was confined to a single institutional setting.

Taken together, these studies indicate that existing research on educational quality assurance in Indonesia remains fragmented, addressing individual institutional types in isolation rather than examining the phenomenon across the education system as a whole. No study to date has systematically compared the challenges and strategies of quality assurance strengthening across madrasah, general schools, pesantren, higher education institutions, and PAUD providers within a single analytical framework. This fragmentation leaves an incomplete picture of whether the obstacles and strategies identified in one institutional context are shared, distinctive, or transferable across other types of institutions a gap this article seeks to address.

At the same time, educational institutions have not remained passive in the face of these challenges. Many have formulated and applied strategies to strengthen their quality assurance systems, including capacity building for human resources through sustained training and mentoring (Sunarni & Ibrahim, 2025), the establishment of solid internal quality assurance teams, the use of information technology in monitoring, evaluation, and quality-data reporting, the strengthening of periodic self-evaluation practices, and closer cooperation with accreditation bodies, local governments, and other stakeholders. These strategies reflect an adaptive institutional response to increasingly high and dynamic quality demands, although implementation does not always proceed smoothly and often requires adjustment to each institution's characteristics, working culture, and resource conditions.

Given this background, strengthening the quality assurance system is not a simple undertaking; it is a multidimensional process spanning policy, leadership, human resources, and organizational culture. A focused review of quality assurance strengthening across different types of educational institutions is therefore both timely and relevant, particularly to provide a comprehensive picture of conditions in the field. Unlike prior studies that examine quality assurance within a single institutional category, this article offers a cross-sectoral synthesis, mapping shared and institution-specific challenges and strategies across five categories of education providers within one integrated framework. This comparative lens constitutes the primary novelty of the present study, distinguishing it from earlier single-context investigations and offering a more holistic basis for policy and institutional decision-making. This article aims to identify the challenges faced by educational institutions in implementing quality assurance systems, analyze the strategies applied to address these challenges, and examine how quality assurance implementation unfolds across different levels and types of institutions, namely madrasah, general schools, pesantren, higher education institutions, and early childhood education providers. It is expected that this review contributes constructive ideas for developing a more effective, applicable, and sustainable educational quality assurance system.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research (literature review) design (Iswahyudi et al., 2023). This approach was chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, strategies, and implementation of quality assurance strengthening across different types of educational institutions. Data sources were drawn from national and international scholarly literature, including books, journal articles, laws and regulations, and policy documents relevant to educational quality assurance (Haramain, 2026).

Data were collected through documentary study and analyzed using content analysis techniques, namely by interpreting, comparing, and synthesizing findings from the reviewed literature (Annasthasya et al., 2025). The results of the analysis are presented descriptively to produce a systematic understanding of quality assurance strengthening efforts as a foundation for the sustainable improvement of educational quality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Across the five categories of educational institutions reviewed, the synthesized literature converges on five interrelated dimensions that determine the strength of a quality assurance system: institutional leadership, human resource capacity, quality culture, governance and monitoring mechanisms, and stakeholder collaboration. Figure 1 summarizes this conceptual framework, which structures the discussion of each institutional context below.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Quality Assurance Strengthening in Educational Institutions (synthesized from the reviewed literature)

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 was constructed manually through the content-analysis procedure adopted in this study, rather than generated through bibliometric network-mapping software such as VOSviewer. This methodological

choice follows directly from the nature of the research design: as a qualitative library research that interprets, compares, and synthesizes recurring themes across a purposively selected body of literature, this study does not rely on a large, structured bibliographic corpus of the kind required to run a valid VOSviewer co-occurrence or co-citation analysis. Applying such software to a small, purposively selected set of sources would risk producing a network map that is statistically unstable and analytically misleading, since bibliometric mapping tools are designed for pattern detection across hundreds of documents rather than as an illustrative device for a handful of synthesized themes. Figure 1 is therefore presented as a conceptual synthesis diagram, an interpretive visualization of the analytical categories that emerged inductively from the content analysis, consistent with standard practice in qualitative literature synthesis. Future bibliometric extensions of this topic, drawing on a systematically retrieved and larger bibliographic dataset, would be well positioned to complement this conceptual model with a VOSviewer-based analysis.

The quality of education in madrasah cannot be separated from a system that ensures the educational process genuinely conforms to established standards. Quality assurance in madrasah is essentially a systematic and continuous process intended to guarantee that the institution meets the National Education Standards while preserving the distinctive Islamic values that define its identity (Anwar, 2018). In practice, this concept operates along two complementary pathways. The first is the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI), through which the madrasah itself maps its quality condition, formulates a fulfillment plan, implements programs, and conducts independent monitoring and evaluation following the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. The second is the External Quality Assurance System (SPME), carried out by external bodies such as the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasah (BAN-S/M) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which provides an objective assessment of the madrasah's quality achievement. Importantly, quality is not a target that, once reached, requires no further attention; it is a process of continuous improvement that demands the involvement of the entire madrasah community, from the principal, teachers, and education staff to the school committee and surrounding community (Luthfi & Rosi, 2025).

For quality assurance to move beyond a conceptual framework, concrete strategies are required. A crucial first step is strengthening the institutional standing of the Madrasah Quality Assurance Team (TPMM) so that roles and responsibilities within the SPMI cycle are clearly defined. Effective planning and organizing constitute a further precondition for sustainable quality assurance, since a well-structured system of task division, delegation of authority, and resource allocation directly conditions how consistently the SPMI cycle is executed in practice (Mardiyah et al., 2026). This needs to be reinforced through human resource capacity building, particularly training for principals and teachers on quality standards, data management, and madrasah self-evaluation (Kurniawan et al., 2025). Self-evaluation data and education report-card results should not remain mere administrative records but should genuinely inform program planning. Collaboration with madrasah supervisors and the Ministry of Religious Affairs is equally important, since consistent technical mentoring makes SPMI implementation more focused. Ultimately, these strategies must converge on a single objective: establishing quality as a working culture rather than a seasonal project undertaken only ahead of

accreditation (Setiawan et al., 2024), supported by transparent quality-information management and reporting systems.

Despite the apparent clarity of these strategies, implementation in the field frequently encounters obstacles. A fundamental challenge is the limited availability of human resources who genuinely understand the concepts and technical aspects of quality assurance. This is compounded by a working culture in many madrasah that still prioritizes administrative document fulfillment, colloquially described as "chasing accreditation," over substantive improvement. The problem is worsened by limited budgets and facilities, particularly in private madrasah or those located in peripheral areas, as well as by discontinuity in programs caused by leadership or quality-team turnover, all of which produce considerable quality disparities between madrasah. Addressing these challenges requires sustained mentoring from madrasah supervisors and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, not only ahead of accreditation assessments; regulatory strengthening accompanied by incentives for madrasah that consistently implement SPMI can further motivate compliance (Ridwan, 2026). On the technical side, digitalizing the quality-reporting system improves efficiency and accountability, while inter-madrasah networks or forums provide a platform for benchmarking good practice. Among all these efforts, however, the decisive factor remains the leadership commitment of the madrasah principal as the primary driver of a quality culture.

Quality assurance implementation in general schools follows a similar dual-track pattern, combining the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and the External Quality Assurance System (SPME). Internally, schools conduct quality mapping, prepare standard-fulfillment plans, implement programs, and carry out periodic school self-evaluation (EDS) following the PDCA cycle. Externally, assessment is conducted by the National Accreditation Board for Schools/Madrasah (BAN-S/M) as an objective validation of the quality achieved. Ideally, both mechanisms operate in tandem so that educational quality is measured not merely from an administrative standpoint but genuinely reflects the quality of the learning process and its outcomes.

To ensure that the quality assurance system functions effectively, schools need to apply a set of concrete strategies. These include strengthening the capacity of principals and teachers through quality-management training, optimizing the use of education report-card data as a basis for program planning (Minarso et al., 2024), and reinforcing the internal quality assurance team so that roles and responsibilities are clearly delineated. Schools also need to cultivate a working culture oriented toward continuous improvement rather than mere administrative compliance ahead of accreditation, so that quality genuinely becomes part of everyday practice instead of a periodic program.

Field implementation of school quality assurance nonetheless faces recurring obstacles, including limited human resources with an in-depth understanding of quality concepts, constrained budgets and facilities particularly in resource-poor schools discontinuity of programs following leadership changes, and quality disparities between schools. Overcoming these obstacles calls for sustained mentoring from school supervisors and local education offices, digitalization of quality reporting for greater efficiency and accountability, stronger leadership commitment from school principals, and

the establishment of inter-school benchmarking forums (Sugiarto, 2025) as a means of mutual learning toward sustainable quality improvement. This finding aligns with evidence that transformational and democratic principal leadership plays a decisive role in building a shared vision, strengthening staff digital literacy, and overcoming behavioral resistance to the digitalization of educational administration (Musmuliadi et al., 2026).

Quality assurance in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) cannot simply be equated with that of formal schools or madrasah, given the distinctive institutional characteristics rooted in a long tradition of Islamic education in Indonesia. These characteristics include a kyai-centered system of guidance, in which the kyai serves as both the central authority on religious knowledge and a moral exemplar (Fahham, 2020); a boarding (asrama) model of education that integrates learning and daily life within a single ecosystem; and a strong emphasis on character formation and Islamic values instilled not merely cognitively but through exemplary practice and habituation. Pesantren also display considerable typological diversity, ranging from salaf pesantren that preserve traditional classical-text (kitab kuning) instruction, to modern pesantren that adopt classical school systems and formal curricula, to hybrid institutions that combine both models (Setiawan et al., 2025). Quality assurance in pesantren must therefore be formulated with these characteristics in mind, encompassing the quality of religious curriculum and instruction, the quality of student guidance and character formation, the quality of ustadz/kyai human resources, institutional management quality, and the quality of the pesantren environment as an integrated educational ecosystem, rather than adopting formal education quality standards wholesale without regard to the pesantren's context and inherent values.

Strengthening pesantren quality requires strategies that respect local authority and wisdom while remaining open to more systematic and accountable governance. These include capacity building for ustadz through training in instructional methodology and classroom management (Faruq et al., 2025), so that knowledge transfer is enriched with more varied and effective methods rather than relying solely on traditional approaches. A curriculum that integrates religious knowledge, life skills, and national and moderation-oriented insight is also needed, ensuring graduates possess competencies relevant to contemporary demands without losing their classical scholarly roots. Developing an internal quality-evaluation system that collectively involves the kyai, pesantren administrators, and the teaching council (dewan asatidz) in formulating and monitoring quality indicators is another important strategy, in formulating and monitoring quality indicators is another important strategy. This is consistent with recent evidence that structured evaluation instruments and risk-management procedures, such as clear standard operating procedures, valid observation tools, and systematic document audits, enable educational supervision to remain systematic, accountable, and responsive to operational challenges (Mulyana et al., 2026). Alongside this, strengthening documentation and administrative governance covering curriculum records, student data, and activity reports remains essential, in ways that do not erode the pesantren's distinctive values. alongside strengthening documentation and administrative governance covering curriculum records, student data, and activity reports in ways that do not erode the pesantren's distinctive values.

Quality development in pesantren nonetheless faces considerable challenges. A fundamental one is the limited availability of human resources who understand systematic quality management, since most pesantren instructors are trained primarily in religious scholarship rather than data-based quality management and evaluation. Another challenge is the dependence of institutional management on the figure of the kyai (Ulya & Triyuliasari, 2024), which makes program sustainability vulnerable to leadership succession. The absence of standardized benchmarks that accommodate the diversity of pesantren types further complicates the uniform application of quality assurance nationally. Facility and infrastructure constraints remain a real obstacle in many rural pesantren with limited funding support, and a lingering perception in some pesantren that quality assurance is an "external" concept continues to slow internalization. A flexible, gradual, and contextual approach to quality strengthening is therefore needed, one capable of accommodating the diversity of pesantren characteristics without diminishing the traditions that constitute the spirit of pesantren education.

Quality assurance implementation in higher education institutions follows a more formal and structured framework than other levels of education, given the complexity of the tridharma (three pillars) of higher education encompassing teaching, research, and community service. Internally, higher education institutions apply the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) referring to the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-Dikti), covering standard-setting, implementation, evaluation, control, and continuous standard improvement through the PDCA cycle, carried out by dedicated units such as the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM) or Quality Assurance Unit (SPM) at the faculty or study-program level. Externally, quality assurance is conducted through accreditation by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) or an appropriate Independent Accreditation Institution (LAM), which assesses the feasibility and quality of study programs and institutions as a whole (Jahudin et al., 2025). Ideally, both mechanisms operate in an integrated manner so that quality assurance is embedded in everyday academic culture and governance rather than remaining an administrative formality ahead of accreditation.

Strengthening higher education quality requires a comprehensive strategy involving the entire academic community (Nugraha et al., 2025). Key elements include building lecturer capacity through improved academic qualifications, certification, and research and publication productivity, given that lecturer quality is a principal indicator of institutional quality; curriculum design based on the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) responsive to labor-market needs and scientific development; and strengthening data-based governance through optimized use of the Higher Education Database (PDDikti) as a decision-making foundation. Equally important are the strengthening of quality culture at the study-program level through periodic internal quality audits, the improvement of learning and research facilities, and the expansion of cooperation with industry partners, government, and other higher education institutions domestically and abroad (Marwiji et al., 2023), so that quality is measured not only academically but also in terms of relevance and competitiveness nationally and globally.

Quality assurance implementation in higher education nevertheless faces substantial challenges, including a considerable quality gap between large institutions and smaller or remotely located ones, a limited number of doctoral-qualified and research-productive lecturers, weak integration between research outputs and industry or community needs, and an administrative accreditation burden often regarded as diverting time and energy from core academic development. Rapidly changing labor-market demands and technological development further require institutions to continually and adaptively update curricula and graduate competencies. Addressing these challenges calls for equitable institutional capacity strengthening, incentives and mentoring for underperforming institutions (Jamasy et al., 2025), digitalization of the quality assurance system for greater efficiency and transparency, and a stronger self-evaluation culture oriented toward substantive rather than merely administrative improvement.

Quality assurance for early childhood education (PAUD) carries a distinctive concept, given that its target population is young children in the "golden age" of development; quality is therefore measured not only academically but holistically, encompassing physical-motor, cognitive, language, socio-emotional, and religious-moral development. Quality assurance at this level refers to the National Standards for Early Childhood Education, covering standards for child-development achievement, content, process, assessment, educators and education personnel, facilities and infrastructure, management, and financing (Damayanti, 2019). The system is implemented through internal quality assurance by each PAUD unit, including play-based learning planning, periodic monitoring of child development, and institutional self-evaluation, reinforced by external quality assurance through accreditation by the National Accreditation Board for PAUD and Non-Formal Education (BAN PAUD and PNF), ensuring that services genuinely meet the fundamental developmental needs of young children.

Improving the quality of PAUD services requires strategies tailored to the characteristics of young children while strengthening institutional capacity. These include enhancing PAUD educator competence through training and certification, given that educator qualifications in many regions remain uneven and often fall short of minimum standards; strengthening a child-centered curriculum (Baqi, 2024) that applies enjoyable, developmentally appropriate play-based learning; and providing safe, healthy, and stimulating play and learning facilities. Strengthening partnerships between PAUD units and parents through parenting programs is another important strategy, ensuring that stimulation of child development continues at home as well as at the institution, while optimizing the role of PAUD clusters and educator associations such as Himpaudi as forums for sharing good practice among institutions within a region.

PAUD quality development faces significant challenges, including a limited number of educators with appropriate qualifications, since many PAUD educators particularly in private institutions and remote areas lack formal early childhood education backgrounds. Other challenges include the access and quality gap between urban and rural PAUD services (Apriliansyah et al., 2025), constrained operating budgets that depress educator welfare and, in turn, motivation and continuity of service, and limited public understanding of the importance of quality early childhood education as distinct from mere childcare. Addressing these challenges requires improved welfare and career

pathways for educators, expanded access to training and technical mentoring (Fiyul & Duryat, 2025), stronger regulation and budget allocation favoring PAUD, and public education campaigns on the importance of the golden age of child development, so that the quality of PAUD services can be improved equitably and sustainably across regions.

Table 1 consolidates the challenges, strategies, and governing mechanisms discussed above for each of the five institutional contexts, providing a comparative reference point for the cross-cutting synthesis that follows.

Table 1. Comparative Synthesis of Quality Assurance Challenges, Strategies, and Governing Mechanisms Across Educational Institution Types

Institution Type	Key Challenges	Key Strategies	Governing Mechanism
Madrasah	Limited HR understanding of quality assurance; accreditation-driven formality; budget/facility constraints; leadership and team turnover	Strengthen TPMM; HR training on data and self-evaluation; supervisor mentoring; digitalized reporting; inter-madrasah benchmarking	SPMI–SPME (PDCA cycle); BAN-S/M and Ministry of Religious Affairs
General School	Limited HR depth; constrained budget/facilities; program discontinuity after leadership change; inter-school quality gap	Principal/teacher training; report-card data use; internal team strengthening; benchmarking forums	SPMI–SPME (PDCA cycle); BAN-S/M
Pesantren	HR trained in religious science rather than quality management; dependence on kyai; absence of standardized benchmarks; facility limits	Ustadz training in pedagogy; integrated curriculum; collective internal evaluation with kyai and asatidz; administrative documentation	Contextual internal evaluation; typology-sensitive standards
Higher Education	Quality gap between large/small institutions; limited doctoral-qualified lecturers; weak research–industry link; accreditation burden	Lecturer qualification/certification; KKNI/OBE curriculum; PDDikti-based governance; industry and international cooperation	SPMI (SN-Dikti, PDCA) via LPM/SPM; BAN-PT / LAM accreditation
Early Childhood Education (PAUD)	Uneven educator qualifications; urban–rural access gap; limited operating budget; low public understanding of PAUD quality	Educator training/certification; child-centered curriculum; parenting partnerships; PAUD cluster/Himpaudi networks	Internal self-evaluation; BAN PAUD and PNF accreditation

Read together, the five contexts show that certain challenge themes recur far more consistently than others. Figure 2 quantifies this pattern by tallying, for each theme, the number of institutional contexts (out of five) in which it emerged as a recurring issue

during the content analysis of the reviewed literature. Human resource capacity is the most pervasive challenge, appearing across all five contexts, followed by budget and facility constraints and a compliance-oriented, accreditation-driven culture, each present in four of the five contexts. Leadership commitment and the digitalization of quality management appear as more context-specific concerns, salient in three of the five contexts.

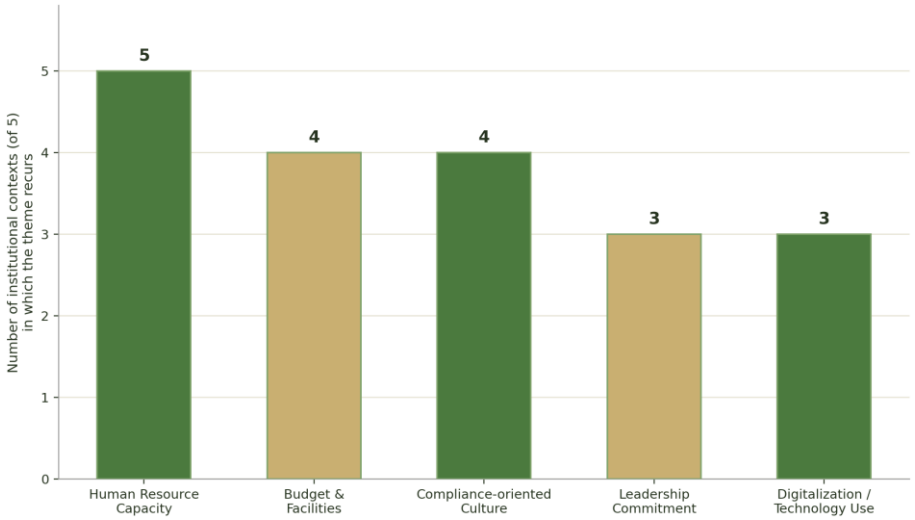

Figure 2. Frequency of Recurring Challenge Themes Across the Five Reviewed Institutional Contexts (content-analysis synthesis)

This distribution supports and extends prior theoretical accounts of quality management in the Total Quality Management (TQM) tradition, particularly Sallis's (2006) argument that human resource capacity functions as the central engine of a quality assurance system, since standards, procedures, and monitoring instruments are only as effective as the people who operationalize them; the near-universal presence of human resource limitations across all five institutional contexts in this study corroborates that claim empirically. At the same time, the finding that a compliance-oriented, accreditation-driven culture recurs in four of the five contexts resonates with the concept of coercive isomorphism developed within institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), which explains why organizations facing similar external accreditation pressures tend to converge toward similar, often symbolic or ceremonial, compliance behaviors rather than substantively differentiated quality practices.

This reading is consistent with, and empirically reinforces, the concern already raised by Maulana et al. (2025) that quality assurance implementation in the Indonesian context is frequently reduced to an administrative formality intended to satisfy accreditation requirements. Rather than challenging existing theory, the pattern in Figure 2 strengthens the explanatory power of both the TQM and institutional-isomorphism perspectives when applied jointly: quality assurance strengthening requires simultaneous attention to internal capacity-building, as emphasized by TQM, and to loosening the external compliance pressures that push institutions toward symbolic rather than substantive quality culture, as explained by institutional theory. The comparatively lower and more context-specific prevalence of leadership commitment and digitalization gaps, each salient in three of the five contexts, suggests these are secondary rather than universal barriers, present where institutional resources are especially constrained, such as in private madrasah or remote PAUD providers, but not structurally endemic to the Indonesian quality

CONCLUSION

Strengthening the educational quality assurance system is fundamentally a continuous effort to ensure that every level and type of education unit from madrasah, schools, and pesantren to higher education institutions and early childhood education providers can deliver quality education in line with established standards while remaining responsive to its own particular context and needs. Although these five categories of institutions differ considerably in context and character, a common thread runs through the discussion above: quality assurance cannot function effectively through administrative standard fulfillment alone. It must be supported by stronger human resource capacity, systematic institutional governance, and a quality culture that grows from internal awareness rather than external pressure.

In madrasah and schools, quality strengthening depends largely on optimizing an Internal Quality Assurance System integrated with external assessment, together with the leadership commitment of the head of the education unit in driving a culture of continuous improvement. In pesantren, quality assurance demands a more contextual approach that respects local wisdom, given the distinctive and diverse character of pesantren institutions. In higher education, quality assurance operates through a more formal and complex framework encompassing the tridharma and the demand for national and global competitiveness. In PAUD, quality is measured not only academically but through the holistic development of the child, making quality assurance heavily dependent on educator quality and parental involvement.

Overall, the challenges faced across these levels of education display a consistent pattern: limited human resource competence in quality management, constrained budgets and facilities, quality gaps between institutions, and a tendency to treat quality assurance as an accreditation-driven formality rather than a substantive and continuous improvement process. Future efforts to strengthen quality assurance should therefore be directed toward cultivating a quality culture embedded in everyday educational practice, supported by consistent regulation, sustained technical mentoring, digitalized reporting systems, and collaboration among stakeholders, so that educational quality improvement can proceed equitably across every level and type of education unit in Indonesia.

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