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Quality Assurance System of Islamic Education in Enhancing Satisfaction and Academic Services Based on ISO 21001:2018

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Abstract : *This study aims to analyze the implementation of a quality assurance system in Islamic education to enhance stakeholder satisfaction and the quality of academic services based on ISO 21001:2018. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data are collected through interviews, observations, and documentation to examine quality assurance practices, academic service management, and stakeholder perceptions. The study focuses on the implementation of quality management principles, including stakeholder orientation, leadership commitment, continuous improvement, and the evaluation of educational services in accordance with the ISO 21001:2018 framework. The findings are expected to provide insights into how a structured quality assurance system can improve the transparency, responsiveness, and effectiveness of academic services while strengthening student and stakeholder satisfaction. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of systematic evaluation, stakeholder participation, and continuous improvement in establishing a sustainable quality assurance culture within Islamic educational institutions. This research contributes to the development of quality management practices in Islamic education by examining the relevance of ISO 21001:2018 as a framework for improving academic service quality and stakeholder satisfaction.*

Keywords : *Quality Assurance System, Islamic Education, ISO 21001:2018, Academic Services, Stakeholder Satisfaction.*

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INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance has become a fundamental concern in higher education as institutions are increasingly required to provide educational services that are accountable, responsive, and capable of meeting the expectations of students and other stakeholders. In this context, quality is not limited to academic outcomes but also encompasses the quality of institutional processes, administrative services, learning facilities, academic support, and interactions between educational institutions and their stakeholders. Student satisfaction consequently becomes an important indicator of institutional quality because it reflects students' perceptions of whether the educational and academic services they receive correspond to their expectations. When academic services fail to meet these expectations, institutions may experience declining trust, dissatisfaction, and reduced student engagement. Therefore, higher education institutions require a systematic quality assurance mechanism that can continuously monitor, evaluate, and improve educational processes and services (Baharun et al., 2021; Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2020; Mundiri & Firdausiah, 2022).

One of the international frameworks specifically developed to address quality management in educational organizations is ISO 21001:2018. Unlike general quality management standards, ISO 21001:2018 is designed to address the particular characteristics of educational organizations and places learners and other beneficiaries at the center of institutional processes (Broto Legowo & Indiarto, 2017). The standard emphasizes learner-focused management, leadership, engagement of people, process-based management, continuous improvement, evidence-based decision making, relationship management, social responsibility, accessibility and equity, ethical conduct in education, and data security and protection (Indarti et al., 2021; Pehlivan & Cicek, 2021). These principles position quality assurance not merely as a mechanism for achieving administrative compliance but as an integrated institutional process intended to ensure that educational services continuously respond to the needs and expectations of learners and stakeholders.

The implementation of ISO 21001:2018 is particularly relevant to the provision of academic services because the quality of educational organizations is experienced directly through institutional processes. Students encounter quality through the competence and responsiveness of lecturers and administrative personnel, accessibility of academic information, learning facilities, curriculum implementation, academic support, and the institution's ability to respond to their needs. Student satisfaction is therefore shaped by the perceived quality of these services as well as by the extent to which institutional performance corresponds to students' expectations (Jiang et al., 2021; Nam & Shin, 2017). Satisfaction itself represents a subjective evaluation formed through students' experiences and perceptions of the services they receive (Hidayat & Wulandari, 2020). Consequently, an effective quality assurance system should not only establish standards but also ensure that these standards are translated into consistent academic services capable of producing positive experiences for learners.

The issue becomes more distinctive in Islamic higher education institutions, particularly those developed within a pesantren-based educational environment. Such institutions operate within a complex educational ecosystem in which academic quality is

expected to coexist with Islamic values, institutional traditions, character formation, and community-oriented responsibilities. Quality assurance in this context therefore cannot be understood solely through conventional managerial indicators. It must also consider how institutional governance, academic services, ethical conduct, stakeholder engagement, and educational values are integrated into the delivery of education. The adoption of ISO 21001:2018 offers an important opportunity for Islamic higher education institutions to institutionalize these processes through a systematic and internationally recognized quality management framework.

The relevance of this issue can be illustrated by the development of a pesantren-based university that successfully implemented an international quality assurance framework through ISO 21001:2018 certification alongside ISO 9001:2015 certification. The institutional transformation was preceded by organizational consolidation and preparation for higher education accreditation before the institution subsequently adopted international quality standards (Alves et al., 2017). This development demonstrates that the implementation of quality standards in pesantren-based higher education is not merely a matter of obtaining certification but may represent part of a broader institutional transformation toward systematic quality management. However, certification alone does not necessarily demonstrate that quality assurance has effectively improved students' academic experiences. The critical issue is how the principles of ISO 21001:2018 are operationalized within institutional processes and translated into academic services that are perceived as meaningful and satisfactory by students.

Previous studies have discussed quality management in educational institutions, the implementation of ISO-based management systems, and the importance of student satisfaction as an indicator of educational service quality (Gallardo-Vázquez et al., 2020). Other studies have highlighted the distinction between ISO 9001:2015 and ISO 21001:2018, particularly in terms of learner-centeredness, stakeholder engagement, accessibility, ethical conduct, and educational outcomes (Nam & Shin, 2017; Sonia, 2021). Nevertheless, existing discussions tend to examine ISO 21001:2018 primarily from the perspective of standard implementation, certification, or organizational quality management (Cassidy, 2016; Jiang et al., 2021). Relatively limited attention has been given to how an ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system is translated into concrete academic services and how this process contributes to student satisfaction, particularly within the distinctive institutional context of Islamic higher education based on pesantren.

This gap indicates the need to move beyond examining ISO 21001:2018 as a certification instrument and instead investigate it as an institutional mechanism for connecting quality standards, quality assurance practices, academic service delivery, and student satisfaction. The novelty of this study lies in positioning the ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system as an integrated mechanism that links institutional quality governance with students' academic service experiences in Islamic higher education. Rather than focusing solely on the formal fulfillment of ISO requirements, this study examines how quality principles are institutionalized through academic service processes and how such institutionalization contributes to the enhancement of student satisfaction. This perspective provides a more

contextual understanding of quality assurance by connecting international quality standards with the educational, managerial, and value-based characteristics of Islamic higher education.

Based on this gap and novelty, this study aims to analyze the implementation of an ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system in enhancing student satisfaction and the quality of academic services in Islamic higher education. The study is expected to contribute to the development of a contextual understanding of quality assurance in Islamic educational institutions by demonstrating how international quality standards can be translated into learner-centered academic service practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to obtain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of an ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system in Islamic higher education. The qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on understanding institutional processes, practices, experiences, and perceptions related to quality assurance, academic services, and student satisfaction within their natural context. The case study design was considered appropriate because the research examined a bounded institutional case and explored how ISO 21001:2018 principles were translated into quality assurance practices and academic service processes. The study focused on the implementation of learner-centered quality assurance, institutional leadership, staff involvement, process management, evidence-based decision making, continuous improvement, stakeholder engagement, accessibility and equity, ethical conduct in education, and data protection as reflected in the institution's academic service practices.

The research was conducted in an Islamic higher education institution that had implemented ISO 21001:2018 as part of its institutional quality assurance system. The institution was purposively selected because it represented a relevant case for examining the implementation of an internationally recognized educational organization management standard within an Islamic higher education environment. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement, knowledge, and experience regarding institutional quality assurance and academic services. The participants consisted of institutional leaders, quality assurance personnel, lecturers, academic and administrative staff, and students as the primary beneficiaries of educational services. The involvement of participants from different institutional positions enabled the researchers to obtain diverse perspectives regarding the formulation, implementation, monitoring, and improvement of quality assurance as well as students' experiences and perceptions of academic services. Participant selection considered their institutional roles, involvement in quality-related processes, and direct experience with academic services.

The researcher served as the primary instrument in the research and was directly involved in data collection, interpretation, and analysis. Data were collected in the natural institutional setting through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with institutional leaders and quality assurance personnel to explore institutional policies, quality governance, implementation of ISO 21001:2018 principles, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and

continuous improvement practices. Interviews with lecturers and administrative staff focused on the implementation of quality standards in academic and administrative services, responsiveness to students' needs, and institutional mechanisms for receiving and responding to feedback. Interviews with students focused on their experiences, expectations, perceptions, and satisfaction with the academic services provided by the institution. Interview questions were adjusted according to the participants' roles while remaining aligned with the research objectives.

Non-participant observations were conducted to examine the implementation of quality assurance principles in actual institutional practices. The observations focused on academic and administrative service processes, interactions between service providers and students, accessibility of academic information, responsiveness of academic personnel, implementation of institutional procedures, and other practices related to academic service quality. Observation findings were documented systematically through field notes. In addition, document analysis was conducted to complement and verify the information obtained through interviews and observations. The documents examined included institutional quality policies, quality manuals, standard operating procedures, academic service guidelines, quality assurance reports, evaluation documents, accreditation-related documents, and other institutional records relevant to ISO 21001:2018 implementation. The use of multiple data sources enabled the researchers to examine the consistency between formal institutional policies and their implementation in academic service practices.

The collected data were analyzed interactively using the model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation was conducted by selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing information obtained from interview transcripts, observation notes, and institutional documents. Relevant statements concerning ISO 21001:2018 implementation, quality assurance practices, academic services, and student satisfaction were identified and coded before being grouped into related categories and emerging themes. Data display was then conducted by organizing the coded data into thematic matrices and narrative descriptions to identify relationships and recurring patterns among the categories. The researchers compared information obtained from different participants and data sources to identify convergent and divergent findings. Conclusions were subsequently drawn through an iterative process in which emerging interpretations were continuously compared with the empirical evidence to ensure that the findings were adequately supported by the collected data.

The trustworthiness of the findings was established through source and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was achieved by comparing information obtained from institutional leaders, quality assurance personnel, lecturers, administrative staff, and students. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing findings derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Relevant institutional documents were also used to verify participants' statements concerning the implementation of quality assurance procedures and academic services. Member checking was conducted by clarifying selected findings and interpretations with relevant participants to ensure that the researchers' interpretations accurately represented their experiences and institutional practices. An audit trail was also

maintained throughout the research process by documenting data collection procedures, field notes, coding decisions, analytical categories, and the development of interpretations. Ethical principles were maintained throughout the study by informing participants about the purpose and procedures of the research, obtaining informed consent, protecting participants' identities, and using the collected information solely for research purposes. Institutional documents were accessed and utilized with appropriate institutional permission.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The analysis identified two distinct findings concerning the implementation of the ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system in pesantren-based higher education. The first finding concerns the institutional planning of the quality assurance system, while the second concerns the implementation and institutionalization of the quality assurance system in academic services. The distinction between the two findings is based on differences in the empirical processes identified in the data: the first emphasizes the rationale, preparation, standard-setting, resource allocation, and socialization of the quality system, whereas the second focuses on the execution, monitoring, evaluation, control, and continuous improvement of the established system.

1. Strategic Planning of an ISO 21001:2018-Based Quality Assurance System

The first finding shows that the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 was preceded by a systematic institutional planning process. The decision to adopt ISO was influenced by four major considerations: competition among educational institutions, the need to improve institutional management, the aspiration to strengthen institutional competitiveness, and the need to develop a more systematic management system. The institution viewed ISO 21001:2018 as an internationally recognized reference for measuring and maintaining institutional quality. The planning process was also connected to previous accreditation experiences, indicating that ISO adoption was not an isolated initiative but part of the institution's broader quality development trajectory. The data indicate that the institution had previously undergone accreditation and used the results of earlier standardization and evaluation as a basis for further institutional improvement.

Empirical evidence for this finding is reflected in the institutional rationale for adopting ISO. The data explicitly identify competition, management improvement, institutional competitiveness, and strengthening the management system as the four factors underlying ISO implementation. The institution also described ISO as a mechanism for maintaining awareness of quality and measuring the quality of its assurance and service systems. Furthermore, the adoption of ISO followed national accreditation, demonstrating that institutional planning was based on an accumulated quality evaluation process rather than solely on the desire to obtain an international certificate.

The planning process also involved adapting ISO 21001:2018 to the characteristics of the educational institution. The institution recognized that educational organizations possess different characteristics from corporate organizations and therefore treated ISO

21001:2018 as an education-specific management framework. The adaptation was directed toward academic management and organizational systems rather than simply transferring corporate quality practices into the educational environment. The institution also used practices from more advanced organizations as comparative references for improving its own quality management system.

A further component of planning involved the preparation of institutional resources. The data show that ISO implementation required financial resources for registration, consultancy, auditing, supervision, and annual surveillance. These expenditures were understood as part of maintaining the standardized quality system after certification. Thus, the planning stage included not only the formulation of quality standards but also consideration of the resources required to sustain the system.

The institution also planned the socialization of ISO-based quality practices. Socialization was carried out through standard operating procedures and institutional communication, including the dissemination of information regarding ISO certification through the institutional website. The data further indicate that the institution associated ISO implementation with the development of a shared quality system through PDCA and PPEPP mechanisms. This shows that planning extended beyond technical certification requirements toward building institutional awareness of quality.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the planning of ISO 21001:2018 was characterized by four interconnected elements: institutional rationale, contextual adaptation, resource preparation, and quality socialization. The evidence indicates that ISO was initially positioned as an institutional framework for responding to competitive pressures and strengthening management before being translated into operational quality practices.

2. Institutional Implementation of ISO 21001:2018 in Academic Quality Assurance

The second finding demonstrates that, following certification, ISO 21001:2018 was implemented as an ongoing institutional quality assurance mechanism rather than treated merely as a certification achievement. The institution sought to maintain conformity between actual activities and documented ISO requirements. The implementation required institutional synergy, coordination among organizational units, quality manuals, documentation, and the application of PPEPP consisting of determination, implementation, evaluation, control, and improvement. Routine evaluation and external audits were also used to maintain conformity with the established standards.

Empirical evidence for this finding is particularly visible in the post-certification practices reported by the institution. The data indicate that certification was followed by continuous efforts to ensure that institutional activities corresponded with documented standards. The institution explicitly maintained manuals and documentation, conducted routine evaluations, and underwent external audits. The data also emphasize that ISO certification was not understood merely as a label but as a mechanism intended to improve services.

Implementation was also integrated into institutional governance and academic quality management. The institution incorporated risk management and organizational analysis into its quality practices and used PPEPP as part of its internal quality cycle. The data further show that the institution maintained the integration of academic and religious education, with parents recognizing the combination of religious and academic education as one of the institution's strengths. The presence of lecturers with international academic experience was also identified as contributing positively to students' academic development.

The implementation further required participation from different institutional units. Each unit was expected to follow established quality procedures, apply PDCA principles, control documentation, and prepare evidence for audit processes. Institutional leadership was involved in decision-making, risk management, and clarifying organizational responsibilities. Documentation of meetings, decisions, confirmations, and institutional communication was used to ensure that members of the academic community remained informed about quality-related activities.

Evidence of the institutional structure supporting implementation is also found in the existence of quality control mechanisms at different organizational levels. The Quality Control Group (GKM) operated at the faculty level, while the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM) operated at the university level. The LPM was responsible for ensuring the maintenance of quality standards across faculties, while continuous monitoring was conducted to examine whether implementation remained aligned with ISO requirements.

However, the implementation was not without challenges. The data reveal that the institution initially encountered difficulties arising from established organizational habits and a human-centered institutional culture. Some members initially experienced concern regarding ISO implementation because of the additional requirements associated with procedures, schedules, and documentation. Over time, these practices became increasingly integrated into routine activities. The data indicate a transition from initial resistance toward adaptation as institutional awareness of quality increased. Documentation subsequently became a mechanism for maintaining consistency in institutional practices, while effective management and resource utilization were required to address implementation complexities.

Overall, the second finding demonstrates that ISO 21001:2018 became institutionalized through quality-cycle implementation, documentation, organizational participation, monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation. Unlike the first finding, which concerns how the quality system was planned and prepared, this finding demonstrates how the established system was operationalized and maintained in institutional practice. The available data further indicate that these implementation processes were ultimately oriented toward improving academic services and responding to the needs of students and the wider educational community.

The two findings demonstrate a sequential quality assurance process. Finding 1 establishes the institutional foundation for ISO 21001:2018 through strategic rationale, contextual adaptation, resource preparation, and socialization. Finding 2 demonstrates the operationalization of that foundation through PPEPP, PDCA, documentation, organizational quality structures, monitoring, evaluation, auditing, and institutional adaptation. Therefore, the data suggest that the contribution of ISO 21001:2018 to academic services is mediated by the institution's ability to transform the standard from a planning framework into an institutionalized quality assurance practice. The evidence available in the study supports the existence of this quality assurance process; however, specific claims regarding the degree of student satisfaction should be supported by direct student interview excerpts, satisfaction records, survey results, or other documented evidence if such data are available.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 in pesantren-based higher education is not merely a process of obtaining an international quality certificate, but represents a transformation in the way educational quality is planned, implemented, controlled, and continuously improved. The quality assurance system is constructed in response to four interconnected institutional needs: increasing competition among educational institutions, strengthening managerial practices, achieving institutional excellence, and improving the overall management system. This finding indicates that ISO 21001:2018 functions as an institutional framework for developing quality awareness rather than simply as an administrative requirement (Wibisono, 2019). In this context, quality assurance becomes an integral component of institutional governance because it provides measurable standards for evaluating academic and educational services. The institution's previous experience with accreditation through BAN-PT also provides an important foundation, as ISO implementation is positioned as a further stage of institutional development based on previous evaluation and standardization experiences (Anggraini et al., 2021). Thus, quality assurance develops progressively from compliance with external standards toward an internally embedded culture of continuous improvement. This interpretation is consistent with the view that quality management systems provide organizations with requirements and recommendations for designing, assessing, and maintaining systematic quality processes (Suwardi and Nurcahyo, 2022; Syafi'i & Fitriyah, 2020).

A significant finding concerns the adaptation of ISO 21001:2018 to the distinctive characteristics of pesantren-based higher education. The implementation does not simply reproduce corporate quality management practices, because educational institutions have different objectives, stakeholders, processes, and measures of success. ISO 21001:2018 is therefore interpreted through the institutional context of academic and Islamic education management. The institution adopts the managerial principles of ISO while maintaining its own educational identity and governance characteristics. This adaptation is important because quality in education cannot be reduced to organizational efficiency or customer satisfaction

alone. It also involves the quality of inputs, learning processes, academic and non-academic outputs, and graduate outcomes. The findings show that the institution attempts to connect standardized quality management with academic services, religious education, institutional governance, and the expectations of students, parents, and the wider community. Consequently, ISO 21001:2018 becomes a mechanism for institutional standardization without eliminating the distinctive identity of pesantren-based higher education.

The implementation of ISO also demonstrates that quality assurance is strongly dependent on the institutionalization of continuous improvement mechanisms. PDCA and PPEPP emerge as important operational principles through which quality is translated from policy into routine institutional practices. Documentation, evaluation, control, and improvement are not treated as separate administrative activities but as interconnected elements of the quality management cycle. The requirement for each unit to follow PDCA principles and maintain controlled documentation indicates that quality assurance is expected to operate continuously rather than only during external audits. Similarly, the implementation of PPEPP strengthens the internal quality cycle by requiring institutions to establish standards, implement them, evaluate their implementation, control deviations, and undertake improvements. This finding reinforces the argument that a quality management system must be established, documented, implemented, and continuously improved to maintain consistent organizational performance. Documentation consequently becomes more than an audit requirement; it serves as institutional memory that allows the organization to maintain consistency and evaluate whether academic services have been implemented according to predetermined standards.

Another important dimension is the relationship between quality assurance and stakeholder satisfaction. The findings indicate that the orientation of ISO 21001:2018 implementation is directed toward students and the community as primary beneficiaries of educational services. This orientation reflects the customer-focus principle in quality management, but in the educational context it must be interpreted more broadly because students, parents, lecturers, administrative personnel, government, and society possess different expectations regarding educational quality. The institution's effort to improve academic services through standardized procedures suggests that satisfaction is constructed through service reliability, clarity of procedures, responsiveness, accountability, and the consistency of educational processes. The positive perception of parents regarding the combination of academic and religious education further indicates that institutional quality is also shaped by the distinctive educational value offered by pesantren-based higher education. Therefore, ISO 21001:2018 can strengthen satisfaction when standardization is directed toward improving the actual educational experience rather than merely fulfilling certification requirements.

The findings further reveal that institutional leadership and collective participation are central to sustaining the quality assurance system. Quality cannot be effectively implemented

by a quality assurance unit alone. The involvement of university leaders, faculty-level Quality Control Groups, the Quality Assurance Institute, lecturers, administrative personnel, and other academic stakeholders is necessary to ensure that standards are translated into everyday practices (Ajjawi et al., 2021; Ståhlkrantz, 2023). Leadership plays an important role in clarifying responsibilities, strengthening coordination, managing risks, and ensuring that evaluation results lead to institutional improvement (Nugraha, 2018). The presence of LPM at the university level and GKM at the faculty level demonstrates a distributed quality governance structure in which quality monitoring is performed across organizational levels. This finding corresponds with the principles of quality management emphasizing leadership, involvement of all people, process orientation, continuous improvement, and fact-based decision-making (Yuri & Nurcahyo, 2013). Accordingly, the effectiveness of ISO 21001:2018 depends not only on the availability of standards but also on the institution's capacity to build shared ownership of quality.

The implementation process also illustrates that quality transformation involves cultural change. The initial resistance and fear toward ISO indicate that standardization can be perceived as an additional burden when institutional members are accustomed to informal or experience-based work practices. However, as procedures, schedules, documentation, and evaluation mechanisms become routine, ISO gradually shifts from being perceived as an external obligation to becoming part of the institutional work culture. This transition is particularly important in pesantren-based higher education, where organizational practices may be strongly influenced by established traditions and interpersonal relationships. The findings suggest that successful implementation requires a balance between formal standardization and the institution's human-centered culture. ISO should therefore not be understood as replacing existing institutional values but as providing a systematic framework through which those values can be translated into accountable and measurable educational services.

At the same time, the findings show that ISO implementation generates financial, administrative, and organizational consequences that need to be managed strategically. Certification, consultancy, auditing, surveillance, and maintenance of the quality system require continuous financial resources. This indicates that ISO 21001:2018 should not be viewed as a one-time investment that ends after certification. Its sustainability depends on the institution's willingness to allocate resources for monitoring, evaluation, documentation, and external surveillance. The financial dimension becomes particularly relevant because the benefits of certification are realized over a longer period through improved governance, service quality, accountability, and institutional credibility. Therefore, the economic value of ISO should be assessed not solely through certification costs but through its contribution to institutional performance and stakeholder satisfaction. This perspective reinforces the distinction between certification as a symbolic achievement and quality management as an ongoing organizational practice.

Overall, the findings indicate that ISO 21001:2018 strengthens the quality assurance system of pesantren-based higher education through the integration of standardized governance, continuous improvement, stakeholder orientation, and institutional participation. The principal contribution of ISO is not the certificate itself, but the creation of a systematic quality cycle that connects planning, implementation, evaluation, control, and improvement with academic and educational services. The institutional experience shows that ISO becomes meaningful when its principles are contextualized within the characteristics of Islamic education and supported by leadership, documentation, risk management, and collective commitment. Thus, the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 can be understood as a strategic mechanism for transforming quality assurance from a compliance-oriented activity into a sustainable institutional culture. In this model, international standardization and Islamic educational identity are not positioned as competing elements; rather, they can be integrated to strengthen governance, improve academic services, and enhance the satisfaction of students and the wider educational community. The central implication is that sustainable educational quality emerges when external standards are internalized through institutional practices and continuously translated into meaningful improvements in educational services.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the quality assurance system based on ISO 21001:2018 at pesantren-based universities is strategically designed to strengthen academic quality, student satisfaction, and educational services. The planning process encompasses the identification of institutional needs and the background of ISO 21001:2018 adoption, alignment of the quality management system with the characteristics and objectives of higher education, consideration of its applicability in educational institutions compared with business organizations, financial implications, stakeholder socialization, and sustainability after certification. These aspects indicate that ISO 21001:2018 is not merely positioned as a certification instrument but as a strategic framework for establishing a systematic, learner-oriented, and continuously improving quality assurance system within pesantren-based higher education.

The implementation of the ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system is reflected in the development and operation of an integrated quality management system, the establishment of clear organizational structures and responsibilities, the alignment of institutional standards with ISO 21001:2018 requirements, and the consistency between quality control, institutional plans, and established standards. The implementation also demonstrates that quality assurance is strengthened through systematic monitoring and continuous improvement, although several challenges remain in ensuring consistent implementation across the institution. Overall, the findings show that ISO 21001:2018 can function as an institutional mechanism for improving the quality of academic services and

strengthening academic satisfaction when its principles are integrated with the organizational culture, governance system, and distinctive values of pesantren-based universities.

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