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ISO 21001:2018-Based Quality Assurance System As A Strategy For Improving Educational Quality

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Abstract

Improving the quality of education has become a primary demand in the globalization era, alongside the rising need for competent and competitive graduates. One approach that can be utilized is the implementation of a quality assurance system based on ISO 21001:2018, which is specifically designed for educational organizations. This study aims to examine the concept, implementation, and contribution of ISO 21001:2018 in enhancing educational quality. The problem formulation focuses on understanding the concept of the quality assurance system, its implementation process within educational institutions, and its impact on improving the quality of educational services. The method employed is qualitative research with a literature review approach (library research), analyzing various scientific sources such as books, journals, and official ISO documents. The analysis techniques include content analysis, theoretical comparison, and conceptual synthesis to obtain a comprehensive understanding. The findings indicate that ISO 21001:2018 offers a systematic framework oriented toward learners, emphasizing the principles of inclusivity, social responsibility, and continuous improvement. The implementation of this standard can enhance the management effectiveness of institutions, the quality of learning services, and stakeholder satisfaction. Consequently, ISO 21001:2018 serves as a relevant strategy to strengthen the educational quality assurance system and boost the competitiveness of educational institutions.

Keywords: ***ISO 21001:2018; educational quality; educational quality assurance***

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INTRODUCTION

The challenges of educational quality in the globalization era demonstrate increasingly complex dynamics, aligned with rising public expectations regarding graduate quality. Socially, this phenomenon is evident in the growing demand of the workforce for human resources who possess not only academic abilities but also 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) consistently shows a quality gap in education between countries, including Indonesia, which still faces challenges in literacy and numeracy (OECD, 2019). This fact illustrates that improving educational quality is not merely a normative necessity but has become a strategic demand in facing global competition.

Globalization has also driven increasingly open competition among educational institutions, both at national and international levels. Educational institutions no longer compete solely within a local scope but must also be able to demonstrate their quality on a global scale. In this context, educational quality becomes the primary indicator determining public trust. According to Edward Sallis, quality in education must be defined as an institution's ability to meet the needs and expectations of customers—both internal customers such as learners and educators, and external customers such as society and industry (Sallis, 2014). Consequently, educational quality is dynamic and must be continuously enhanced through a sustainable process.

Theoretically, improving educational quality cannot be separated from the implementation of a structured quality assurance system. This system functions as a mechanism ensuring that all educational processes run according to established standards. Quality assurance is not only oriented toward outcome evaluation but also encompasses process control and continuous improvement. This concept aligns with the thinking of W. Edwards Deming, who emphasized the importance of the continuous improvement cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) in enhancing organizational quality (Deming, 1986). In the context of education, applying this principle allows institutions to systematically identify weaknesses, improve learning processes, and enhance overall organizational performance.

Furthermore, the existence of international standards is a crucial factor in strengthening the educational quality assurance system. International standards, such as ISO, provide a systematic, documented, and measurable framework, making it easier for educational institutions to manage quality consistently. These standards also provide global legitimacy to the quality of educational institutions, which ultimately boosts institutional competitiveness. According to

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Hoyle, implementing international quality standards in educational organizations can enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability in institutional management (Hoyle, 2007).

In recent developments, ISO 21002:2018 has emerged as a guideline specifically designed to support the implementation of an ISO 21001-based educational organization management system. This standard emphasizes vital principles such as inclusivity, equity, accessibility, and a focus on learners as the center of educational services. Unlike other more generalized quality standards, ISO 21002:2018 provides a more contextual and applicable guide for educational institutions in implementing a quality management system.

Empirically, various studies indicate that implementing an international standard-based quality assurance system can positively impact the improvement of educational quality. For instance, a study conducted by Psomas and Antony shows that the implementation of an ISO-based quality management system can enhance organizational performance, customer satisfaction, and the effectiveness of operational processes (Antony, 2017). In an educational context, this translates to improvements in the quality of learning services, institutional management, and student satisfaction.

Nevertheless, in practice, many educational institutions still face constraints in optimally implementing quality assurance systems. These constraints include limited human resources, a lack of understanding of international standards, and resistance to organizational change. Therefore, a systematic and strategic approach is required to implement an international standard-based quality assurance system, such as ISO 21002:2018.

Based on the aforementioned description, the researcher argues that the application of an ISO 21002:2018-based quality assurance system is a relevant and effective strategy for improving educational quality. This argument is based on three main points. First, socially, public demands for educational quality continue to rise. Second, theoretically, quality assurance systems are proven capable of enhancing organizational quality through a continuous improvement approach. Third, practically, international standards such as ISO provide a clear and measurable framework for managing educational quality.

Thus, this study is essential to deeply examine the concept, implementation, and contribution of an ISO 21002:2018-based quality assurance system in enhancing educational quality. This study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of educational quality management in Indonesia.

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Educational Quality Concept

Educational quality is defined as an institution's capacity to satisfy the needs and expectations of educational service users, including learners, educators, and the community. In the perspective of modern educational management, quality is measured not only by final learning outcomes but also encompasses service compliance, the learning process, and stakeholder satisfaction. According to Sallis, quality in education must be understood as an institution's ability to meet the expectations of both internal and external educational service users (Sallis, 2014). This indicates that educational quality is dynamic and requires continuous enhancement through a structured system.

Quality Assurance System in Education

An educational quality assurance system is a systematic framework utilized to ensure that all educational processes run in accordance with established standards. This system focuses not only on outputs but also spans planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. In this study, quality assurance is understood as a cyclical and sustainable quality control mechanism, aligning with Deming's Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) concept, which emphasizes the vital importance of continuous improvement within organizations (Deming, 1986).

ISO 21001:2018 as an Educational Management System

ISO 21001:2018 is an international standard specifically designed for educational organizations aiming to enhance the effectiveness of educational services through a learner-centered quality management system approach. This standard emphasizes stakeholder engagement, continuous improvement, and a focus on the needs of learners as the center of educational services. Consequently, ISO 21001:2018 serves not only as a quality control tool but also as an instrument for transforming educational institutions into more adaptive and high-quality entities (ISO, 2018).

Continuous Improvement and the PDCA Cycle

The implementation of ISO 21001:2018 is inseparable from the principle of continuous improvement. The PDCA (Plan-Do-Check-Act) model is used as a foundation to ensure that every educational process is constantly evaluated and sustainably enhanced. Deming asserts that organizational quality can only be achieved through a systematic and measurable continuous improvement cycle (Deming, 1986).

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METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, a method focused on collecting and analyzing data sourced from various relevant literatures to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. This approach was selected because the study does not involve direct field data collection; instead, it deeply examines the concepts, theories, and prior research findings related to the ISO 21002:2018-based quality assurance system within the educational context. According to John W. Creswell, qualitative research aims to explore and understand the meaning of a phenomenon based on theoretical and interpretative perspectives (Creswell, 2014). The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained from the official ISO 21002:2018 documents containing the principles, guidelines, and management system framework for educational organizations. Meanwhile, secondary data are derived from various scientific sources such as books, indexed journal articles, proceedings, and research reports relevant to the research topic.

Data collection was conducted through documentation study techniques, specifically by reviewing written documents related to the research object, alongside scientific literature searches via academic databases such as Google Scholar, SINTA, and other journal portals to ensure the validity and credibility of the sources used (Zed, 2014). The data analysis technique utilizes content analysis, a method used to systematically identify, categorize, and interpret the meaning of the analyzed texts or documents (Krippendorff, 2018). Furthermore, this study also utilizes a comparative technique to compare various theories and prior research findings to identify relevant similarities or differences, as well as conceptual synthesis to formulate a holistic understanding regarding the implementation of the ISO 21002:2018-based quality assurance system in enhancing educational quality. Consequently, this approach is expected to generate a deep, systematic analysis grounded in a robust theoretical foundation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of an ISO 21001:2018 Based Educational Quality Assurance System

The educational quality assurance system is a structured framework designed to ensure that all educational delivery processes run in accordance with established standards and are capable of producing high-quality graduates. Conceptually, quality assurance does not solely focus on final outcomes; rather, it encompasses comprehensive process control, spanning from planning and implementation to evaluation and continuous improvement actions. According to Edward Sallis, quality in education must be understood as an institution's ability to meet and even

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exceed the needs and expectations of educational service users (Sallis, 2014). Consequently, the quality assurance system serves as a strategic instrument to maintain quality consistency while driving continuous improvement within educational institutions.

In the context of international standards, ISO 21001:2018 emerges as an educational organization management system specifically designed to enhance the effectiveness of educational services through a systematic and measurable approach. This standard emphasizes the importance of learner-centered services and the engagement of all stakeholders in the quality improvement process (ISO, 2018). Therefore, an ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system is not merely administrative; it also demands a shift in organizational culture toward a sustainable culture of quality.

According to Agus Zaenul Fitri, the primary goal of ISO 21001:2018 quality assurance is to evaluate whether an educational institution has met the needs of learners and other beneficiaries of educational services. By fulfilling the clauses of the ISO 21001:2018 standard, educational institutions will be able to provide educational products and services that satisfy the requirements expected by interested parties (Fitri, 2022). According to Joseph M. Juran, quality is "fitness for use," meaning a product or service is deemed high-quality if it can consistently meet user needs (Juran, 1999). In the educational context, this implies that educational institutions must be capable of delivering services relevant to the needs of learners, the workforce, and society at large.

In addition to serving as a tool to guarantee quality, the quality assurance system functions as a control and evaluation mechanism for institutional performance. Through this system, institutions can conduct periodic monitoring of learning processes, educator performance, and the effectiveness of implemented policies. Another equally crucial function is serving as a vehicle for continuous improvement, where every finding in the evaluation process is utilized as a baseline for improvement and innovation. This concept aligns with the thinking of W. Edwards Deming, who emphasized the importance of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle in continuously enhancing organizational quality (Deming, 1986). Thus, quality assurance is not static but rather dynamic and adaptive to environmental changes.

Furthermore, quality management principles in education serve as a vital foundation for implementing an ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system. The first principle is customer focus, which in the educational context means prioritizing the needs and satisfaction of learners as the primary service users. The second principle is leadership, where institutional leaders play a strategic role in establishing a vision, culture, and commitment to quality. The third principle is

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the engagement of people, emphasizing the active participation of all educators and staff members in quality enhancement efforts. The fourth principle is the process approach, which manages educational activities as an interrelated and integrated system. The fifth principle is continuous improvement, which constitutes the core of the quality management system. These principles align with the concept of Total Quality Management developed by experts such as Philip B. Crosby, who stressed the importance of error prevention and consistent quality improvement (Crosby, 1979).

In practice, applying these principles demands a strong commitment from all components of the educational institution, from leadership to operational staff. Additionally, it requires a robust documentation system, clear standard operating procedures, and measurable evaluation mechanisms. Consequently, an ISO 21001:2018-based quality assurance system becomes not just an administrative tool, but an organizational transformation strategy to improve overall educational quality. Based on the aforementioned description, it can be concluded that an ISO 21001:2018-based educational quality assurance system is a comprehensive and systematic approach to guaranteeing and enhancing educational quality by implementing quality management principles oriented toward user satisfaction and continuous improvement.

Characteristics of ISO 21001:2018 Quality Assurance

`The ISO 21001:2018 standard possesses relatively distinct characteristics compared to general quality management standards like ISO 9001, primarily because it is explicitly designed for educational organizations. The fundamental difference lies in the value orientation and the approach utilized. While general quality standards tend to focus on process efficiency and customer satisfaction within an industrial context, ISO 21001:2018 places learners at the center of services and as the primary subjects in the educational process. This indicates a paradigm shift from a product-based approach to a human-centered approach. According to Edward Sallis, quality in education cannot be equated entirely with quality in industry because education involves a complex and multidimensional process of human development (Sallis, 2014).

One of the main advantages of ISO 21001:2018 lies in its integration of quality management principles with educational values that are inclusive and socially oriented. This standard develops eleven management principles that form the foundation of its implementation. These principles include a focus on learners and other beneficiaries, visionary leadership, engagement of people, process approach, continuous improvement, evidence-based decision-making, and relationship management. Furthermore, there are additional principles unique to

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education, namely social responsibility, accessibility and equity, ethical conduct in education, data security and protection, and sensitivity to cultural diversity (ISO, 2018). The presence of these principles demonstrates that ISO 21001 emphasizes not only the technical aspects of management but also the ethical and social dimensions of educational delivery.

The principle of social responsibility in ISO 21001:2018 asserts that educational institutions play a strategic role in shaping a sustainable and civilized society. Educational institutions are responsible not only for the academic achievement of learners but also for character building, moral values, and the social contributions of graduates. This aligns with the view of Joseph M. Juran, who emphasized that quality relates not only to outcomes but also to the impact generated on society at large (Juran, 1999). Thus, social responsibility becomes an integral part of the educational quality management system.

Moreover, the principles of accessibility and equity are crucial characteristics distinguishing ISO 21001 from other quality standards. This standard requires educational institutions to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to access educational services without discrimination. This encompasses providing disability-friendly facilities, inclusive policies, and learning approaches adaptive to individual needs. According to UNESCO (2020), inclusive education is key to creating an equitable and sustainable education system. Therefore, the implementation of this principle serves as an essential indicator in assessing the quality of educational institutions.

From an implementation standpoint, ISO 21001:2018 also underscores the importance of ethical conduct across all educational activities. Ethics serve as the foundation for interactions among educators, learners, and other stakeholders. This principle includes academic honesty, transparency in assessment, and the protection of learners' rights. Additionally, aspects of data security and protection have become a primary focus, particularly in the digital era which demands secure and responsible information management.

Compared to general quality standards, ISO 21001:2018 can be described as more "humane" because it evaluates organizational success not only through efficiency and effectiveness but also by how well the organization meets human needs holistically. This approach views learners as individuals with diverse potentials, needs, and backgrounds. Consequently, the quality management system is not rigid; rather, it is flexible and adaptive to the educational context.

Argumentatively, this more humane approach stands as the core advantage of ISO 21001:2018 in modern education. This is due to the nature of education, which cannot be

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simplified into a production process like in manufacturing. Education involves cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that require a more comprehensive approach. According to W. Edwards Deming, organizational quality is heavily influenced by a system capable of accommodating human needs thoroughly (Deming, 1986). Therefore, the application of ISO 21001:2018 can offer a highly relevant solution to addressing educational quality challenges in the era of globalization.

In conclusion, the exclusive characteristic of ISO 21001:2018 lies in the integration of quality management principles and human values in education. This standard functions not only as a tool for quality control but also as a framework driving the transformation of educational institutions toward a more inclusive, ethical, and human centered system.

Clauses of the ISO 21001:2018 Assurance System

Before educational institutions implement the ISO 21001:2018 standard, a comprehensive understanding of the clause structure serves as a fundamental step in building an effective quality assurance system. Each clause within this standard functions as a framework directing the processes of planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of educational quality. Although structurally similar to ISO 9001:2015, ISO 21001:2018 is designed with contextual adjustments tailored specifically to the characteristics of educational organizations, particularly in emphasizing learner satisfaction, the relevance of learning processes, and stakeholder engagement. Consequently, understanding these clauses is not merely an administrative requirement but becomes a strategic foundation for systematically and measurably improving educational services based on user needs. According to Agus Zaenul Fitri, there are ten clauses in ISO 21001:2018:

1. Scope
   This clause defines the scope of the standard's application within educational organizations. ISO 21001:2018 is intended for institutions committed to enhancing the satisfaction of learners and other beneficiaries through an effective management system. This standard is generic and applicable to various types of educational organizations, regardless of their size, type, or method of delivery.
2. Normative References
   This section states that there are no additional normative references that must be cited. This implies that the standard can be used independently without reliance on other standards.
3. Terms and Definitions
   This clause provides explanations of essential terms used throughout ISO 21001:2018. The

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objective is to align understanding and prevent disparate interpretations during the implementation of the standard.

4. Context of the Organization
   Organizations are required to identify internal and external factors that could influence the achievement of the educational management system's objectives. Furthermore, institutions must understand the needs and expectations of stakeholders, such as learners, educators, parents, and the government. Defining the scope of the management system is also conducted at this stage.
5. Leadership
   This clause emphasizes the critical role of leadership in the successful implementation of the management system. Leaders must demonstrate commitment, establish a quality policy, and ensure the system operates effectively. In ISO 21001, there is an additional emphasis on special educational needs compared to general standards.
6. Planning
   In this clause, organizations are required to design strategic steps to achieve their quality objectives. Planning includes identifying risks and opportunities, establishing targets, and formulating action plans to achieve them. Any organizational changes must also be planned systematically to avoid disrupting ongoing processes.
7. Support
   This clause discusses the supporting aspects necessary for the management system, such as resources, personnel competence, awareness, communication, and the management of documented information. All these elements serve as the foundation for the system to function optimally.
8. Operation
   The operational clause regulates the direct execution of educational processes. Organizations must plan, control, and ensure that all learning activities and educational services run in accordance with established standards.
9. Performance Evaluation
   At this stage, organizations monitor and measure system performance. Evaluation is conducted through data analysis, internal audits, and management reviews to ensure system effectiveness and identify areas requiring improvement.
10. Improvement
    The final clause underscores the importance of continuous improvement. If nonconformities

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are identified, organizations must immediately take corrective actions. Furthermore, institutions are encouraged to constantly seek innovation opportunities to enhance educational service quality and satisfy the needs of learners and other stakeholders (Fitri, 2022).

Overall, the ten clauses of ISO 21001:2018 form a systematic management cycle, moving from context determination to continuous improvement. This structure assists educational organizations in managing quality in a well-directed, measurable, and adaptive manner in response to changes.

Implementation of the ISO 21001:2018 Quality Assurance System

The process of adopting the ISO 21001:2018 standard shares similarities with other ISO frameworks. However, for institutions that have previously implemented a quality management system (such as ISO 9001), the transition process will be considerably more linear and efficient. Based on the literature review of Agus Zaenul Fitri's book, the systematic implementation steps can be outlined as follows:

1. Gap Analysis
   The initial step involves comparing current management conditions with the ideal criteria set by ISO 21001:2018. This process serves to map out the percentage of standard fulfillment achieved by the institution. At this stage, specialized evaluation instruments are required to identify which areas need to be improved or completed.
2. Drafting ISO 21001:2018 Documentation
   Once gaps are identified, the institution must construct a documentation structure. If the organization already possesses a document base from ISO 9001, this process merely requires adjusting terminology and definitions to be more specific to the educational context. However, for new institutions, drafting must start from scratch (spanning quality policies, manuals, to SOPs) by referencing digital literature or utilizing external expert assistance to ensure the document formats match the institution's unique needs.
3. Socialization and Internalization of Management
   Implementation will not succeed without human resource capacity building. This stage focuses on intensive training and socialization for educators and administrative staff regarding the implementation of ISO 21001:2018. The goal is to build a collective awareness that the ISO 21001:2018 quality management system is not merely an administrative burden, but an instrument to enhance the overall quality of educational services.

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4. Periodic Internal Audit
   Institutions are required to conduct well-planned internal audits. These audits act as a self-control mechanism to guarantee that daily operations align with ISO 21001 prerequisites. The findings from internal audits serve as evaluation material to implement gradual corrective measures toward system optimization.
5. ISO 21001:2018 Certification Process
   Once all criteria within the ISO 21001 clauses have been fulfilled and consistently executed, the institution can apply for assessment to an official certification body. Through an external audit process, the certification body will verify the institution's eligibility to receive an international certificate. Collaboration with expert consultants often becomes a strategic choice to ensure the entire sequence of this process runs more effectively and efficiently (Fitri, 2022).

In conclusion, the implementation of ISO 21001:2018 is a strategic step to transform educational institution governance toward global quality standards. As a management system tailored specifically for educational organizations, this standard offers a more relevant framework compared to general management models. Through systematic stages—ranging from gap analysis and document codification to internal audits—institutions can build an accountable and transparent quality assurance system.

CONCLUSION

The ISO 21001:2018-based educational quality assurance system represents a comprehensive approach to systematically and sustainably improving the quality of educational services. This system highlights not only final outcomes but also manages the entire educational process, spanning continuous planning, implementation, evaluation, and corrective actions. By focusing on the needs of learners and stakeholders, this standard encourages educational institutions to deliver services that are relevant, adaptive, and high-quality. The primary characteristic of ISO 21001:2018 lies in its more humanistic approach compared to general quality standards. It integrates quality management principles with core educational values, including inclusivity, equity, social responsibility, and institutional ethics. Consequently, this system functions not merely as a quality control tool but as an instrument of organizational culture transformation toward human-centered development.

Furthermore, the clause structure of ISO 21001:2018 provides a clear, well-directed framework for managing educational quality. Each clause is thoroughly integrated to form a

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management cycle that covers context analysis, leadership, planning, operation, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement. Its implementation is executed through systematic stages, ranging from gap analysis and document drafting to socialization, internal audits, and the final certification process. In conclusion, the application of ISO 21001:2018 serves as an effective strategy for building a transparent, accountable, and globally competitive quality assurance system. This standard is highly capable of supporting educational institutions in enhancing their service quality while addressing the demands and challenges of modern education.

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