
Relational Architecture of Quality Assurance: Leadership, Work Systems, and Work Consistency in Islamic Vocational Education" A Conceptual-Analytical Review

Yusup Suffandi^{1*}, Mohammad Makinuddin², Muhammad Muizzuddin³

^{1,2,3}Postgraduate Program, Universitas Kiai Abdullah Faqih, Gresik, Indonesia

Correspondence email: yusupsuffandi@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the relational nexus among quality assurance, leadership, work systems, and work consistency within the context of Islamic vocational education. Employing a qualitative descriptive method with a library research (conceptual-analytical) design, the study synthesizes theoretical and empirical literature to map how these four constructs interact in supporting institutional quality culture. The findings indicate that visionary leadership grounded in prophetic values (uswah hasanah, amanah, and 'adl) functions as the principal driving force in cultivating a culture of quality within Islamic vocational institutions. A structured and measurable work system, anchored in clear standard operating procedures (SOP), serves as the operational bridge that translates quality-assurance policy into the institution's daily practice. Furthermore, work consistency, sustained through continuous evaluation and the collective commitment of all school members (amanah, itqan, and ihsan), is found to exert a direct influence on the improvement of graduate quality. The study also identifies the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle as a practical mechanism through which management and quality-assurance functions complement one another, and shows that the interaction between quality-assurance strength and work-discipline strength produces four distinct organizational conditions. The study concludes that the success of quality assurance in Islamic vocational education is not determined solely by administrative regulation, but rather by the synergy between adaptive leadership styles, disciplined work systems, and a consistently internalized Islamic work ethic.

Keywords

Quality Assurance; Leadership; Work System; Work Consistency; Islamic Vocational Education



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INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance in education constitutes a systematic and planned effort to ensure that educational processes and outcomes conform to established standards. Within Islamic-based public and vocational institutions, quality assurance is not oriented solely toward learners' competency attainment; it is equally directed toward the formation of an Islamic character grounded in faith (iman), morality (akhlak), and professionalism. Quality, however, is rarely the product of a single administrative mechanism. It emerges instead from the synergy of several interdependent components, among which leadership, work systems, and work consistency occupy a strategic position in sustaining the implementation of quality assurance at the institutional level.

Leadership is widely regarded as the principal determinant of an institution's quality direction and policy. An effective leader functions not merely as a decision-maker, but also as a motivator, an innovator, and a driver of a quality-oriented organisational culture. In the Islamic tradition, leadership must additionally reflect the values of exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*), trustworthiness (*amanah*), and justice (*'adl*); such leadership is capable of generating a work climate that is conducive to the sustained improvement of quality. Visionary and transformational leadership styles have been shown to strengthen a school's quality culture by inspiring members to internalise high standards, while participative leadership - in which decision-making is distributed across the organisation - has been found to strengthen quality culture and organisational commitment simultaneously.

Beyond leadership, a structured work system forms the operational foundation upon which quality assurance is implemented. A sound work system is characterised by the presence of standard operating procedures (SOP), a clear division of tasks, and a continuous evaluation mechanism; without such a system, the implementation of quality assurance tends to be inconsistent and difficult to monitor. Empirical studies on vocational and Islamic-based schools further confirm that a well-managed quality-assurance system depends heavily on the presence of a defined operational structure connecting policy with everyday practice.

Work consistency constitutes a third, equally decisive element. It reflects the extent to which individuals and organisations execute their duties in accordance with established standards over time, and is closely tied to work ethic, discipline, and organisational culture. In the Islamic perspective, work consistency is inseparable from the values of *amanah* (trustworthiness), *itqan* (thoroughness and professional excellence), and *ihsan* (doing one's best) - values that transform routine duties into a form of worship (*'ibadah*) and, in turn, sustain quality over the long term. Teacher work discipline in particular has been found to correlate directly with the overall quality of education produced by a school.

Although the literature on quality assurance in Islamic education has expanded considerably, existing studies tend to examine each construct in isolation: some focus on the mechanics of internal quality-assurance cycles, others on quality-assurance policy at the institutional or governmental level, and still others on leadership or work-ethic constructs independently of the operational system that sustains them. What remains underexplored is the relational architecture that connects leadership, work systems, and work consistency as an integrated whole beneath the umbrella of quality assurance, particularly within the specific context of Islamic vocational education, where the demands of technical competency intersect with the demands of religious character formation.

This article addresses that gap through a conceptual-analytical review of the literature, aiming to map the relational nexus among quality assurance, leadership, work systems, and work consistency in Islamic vocational education. Three questions guide the analysis: first, how does leadership relate to, and drive, the quality-assurance culture of Islamic vocational institutions? Second, how does a structured work system function as the operational bridge between quality-assurance policy and daily institutional practice? Third, how does work consistency - anchored in the Islamic work ethic - sustain quality assurance over time, and what organisational configurations emerge from the interaction between quality-assurance strength and work-discipline strength? By answering these questions, this study contributes a conceptual framework that positions quality assurance not as an isolated administrative function, but as the outcome of a dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship among leadership, systems, and consistency.

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method with a library research (conceptual-analytical) design. This design was selected because the object of inquiry is the relational structure among concepts - quality assurance, leadership, work systems, and work consistency - rather than a specific empirical case or institution; the study therefore does not draw on primary field data such as interviews, observation, or institutional documents from a named school. The unit of analysis is the body of peer-reviewed scholarly literature addressing these four constructs within the context of education in general and Islamic vocational education in particular.

Data sources consist of national and international journal articles retrieved from Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, and Crossref-indexed publishers, using keyword combinations such as "quality assurance", "Islamic leadership", "visionary leadership", "work system", "standard operating procedure", "work discipline", "Islamic work ethic", and "PDCA cycle". The inclusion criteria applied were: (1) published in a peer-reviewed, open-access journal; (2) directly relevant to education, Islamic institutional management, or organisational quality; and (3) published in 2020 or later, with a small number of earlier seminal works retained where they provide indispensable theoretical grounding.

Data analysis was conducted through a thematic content-analysis procedure comprising three stages: (1) unitizing, in which relevant statements and findings were extracted from each source; (2) categorizing, in which the extracted units were grouped into four thematic domains corresponding to the constructs of quality assurance, leadership, work systems, and work consistency; and (3) synthesizing, in which the relationships among the four domains were mapped and interpreted to construct the relational architecture presented in the Results and Discussion section. To support conceptual clarity, the relationships identified in the literature are additionally presented in tabular and diagrammatic form, each of which summarises and visualises content that is directly drawn from, and consistent with, the reviewed sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quality Assurance and Leadership: Visionary Direction as the Engine of a Quality Culture

Quality assurance is a series of systematic processes intended to ensure that all educational activities are carried out in accordance with established standards. In Islamic vocational education, quality assurance encompasses not only the academic dimension but also character formation, spiritual values, and learners' readiness for the world of work. It involves planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement; the success of this cycle is strongly influenced by leadership. Leadership in Islamic education is the capacity to influence, direct, and mobilise institutional resources toward educational goals. Beyond organisational outcomes, Islamic leadership is oriented toward moral and spiritual values such as amanah, justice, and exemplary conduct (*uswah hasanah*); an Islamic educational leader is expected to possess balanced managerial, social, and spiritual competence, functioning not merely as an administrator but also as an educator, motivator, and agent of change.

Not every leadership style contributes equally to the strengthening of quality assurance. Table 1 summarises four leadership styles that the reviewed literature identifies as particularly relevant to building a culture of quality in Islamic vocational institutions.

Leadership Style	Description in Relation to Quality Assurance
Transformational	Inspires and motivates institutional members to pursue high quality standards, and has been shown to strengthen job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour in Islamic educational institutions (Mastur et al., 2022).

Leadership Style	Description in Relation to Quality Assurance
Visionary	Provides long-term direction for the development of educational quality; visionary leadership competencies have been found to be central to developing Islamic schools and madrasah into quality-oriented institutions (Manzoor, 2023; Said et al., 2023; Waris Tasrim, 2026).
Participative	Involves the whole institutional community in decision-making; participative leadership has been shown to strengthen quality culture and organisational commitment simultaneously (Damanik et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2022).
Spiritual (Islamic)	Integrates Islamic values into every policy and action, positioning leadership as a form of trusteeship (amanah) accountable to God and to the institutional community (Baharun & Mundiri, 2022).

Table 1. Leadership styles supporting quality assurance in Islamic vocational education

Effective leadership produces measurable effects on the quality of education, as summarised in Table 2. Conversely, weak leadership tends to leave the quality-assurance system stagnant, regardless of how complete its formal documentation may be.

Impact Domain	Effect of Effective Leadership
Educator performance	Improves the performance of teaching and education-support staff through clear direction and role modelling (Baharun et al., 2021).
Institutional culture	Encourages the emergence of a shared quality culture across the institution.
Stakeholder satisfaction	Increases the satisfaction of learners, parents, and other stakeholders.
Graduate competitiveness	Strengthens the competitiveness of graduates in further education and the labour market.
Sustainability	Ensures the continuity of quality improvement as an ongoing institutional process rather than a one-time project (Nurhayati et al., 2022).

Table 2. Impact of effective leadership on the quality of Islamic vocational education

B. Quality Assurance and Work Systems: The Operational Bridge

A work system is a structured and organised sequence of processes through which an organisation carries out its activities in pursuit of defined objectives. In the educational context, a work system encompasses the division of tasks, workflow, operational procedures, and coordination mechanisms among institutional units. A sound work system is marked by clarity of duties and responsibilities, the presence of standard operating procedures (SOP), and a measurable evaluation mechanism; in Islamic vocational education, the work system must additionally be aligned with Islamic values such as amanah, responsibility, and professionalism.

The reviewed literature identifies several roles that the work system plays in supporting the implementation of quality assurance, summarised in the diagram below.

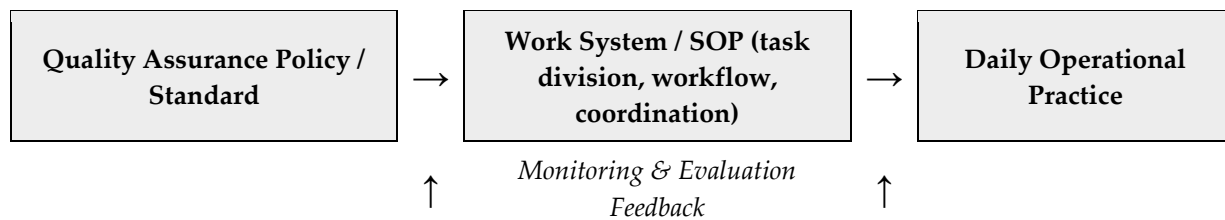


Diagram 1. The work system as the operational bridge between quality-assurance policy and daily practice

Empirical studies on vocational and pesantren-based (Islamic boarding school) institutions confirm that a work system functions in four interrelated ways: it guarantees the consistency of work processes by ensuring that every activity is carried out according to the established standard; it facilitates supervision and evaluation through clearly defined procedures; it increases the efficiency and effectiveness of work by reducing error; and it serves as an operational guideline for educators and education-support staff in carrying out their duties. Nevertheless, the implementation of a work system in support of quality assurance frequently encounters obstacles: limited understanding of SOP among staff, weak commitment from educators and education-support personnel, incomplete documentation of the work system, insufficient coordination among institutional units, and resistance to organisational change. Left unaddressed, these challenges can significantly weaken the effectiveness of quality assurance, regardless of how well the policy itself is formulated.

Quality Assurance and the Islamic Work Ethic: Sustaining Consistency

Quality assurance is a continuous process aimed at ensuring that every institutional activity is carried out according to standard - encompassing planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement. In Islamic education, quality assurance additionally carries a value dimension: it ensures that the educational process produces graduates who are not only academically competent but also possess noble character (akhlak karimah) and internalised Islamic values. Work ethic refers to the attitudes, values, and habits that an individual demonstrates in carrying out daily duties - reflected in a person's spirit, sense of responsibility, discipline, and commitment. Within the Islamic perspective, work carries a broader meaning: it is a form of worship ('ibadah) to Allah SWT, and is guided by a distinctive constellation of values, summarised in Table 3.

Islamic Work-Ethic Value	Meaning and Function in Sustaining Quality
Amanah (Trustworthiness)	Being reliable and accountable in carrying out entrusted duties, forming the ethical basis of institutional trust (Suhendra et al., 2025).
Itqan (Thoroughness / Excellence)	Working with precision, professionalism, and a commitment to continuous improvement; strengthens accuracy and reduces error and waste (Suhendra et al., 2025).
Ihsan (Doing One's Best)	Promoting ethical, fair, and cooperative behaviour that creates a supportive work climate and enhances engagement (Suhendra et al., 2025; Atiya et al., 2024).
Discipline and Responsibility	Ensuring that duties are executed consistently and on time, directly correlated with the overall quality of education produced by the institution (Nurhayati et al., 2022).

Table 3. Islamic work-ethic values that sustain work consistency

Taken together, these values indicate that work consistency in Islamic vocational education is not oriented toward outcomes alone, but equally toward the quality of the process itself - a process regarded as possessing devotional (ibadah) value. A critical review of the Islamic work-ethic literature further confirms that the internalisation of itqan, ihsan, and amanah consistently correlates with higher productivity and lower rates of error and turnover across diverse organisational settings, including educational institutions.

Quality Assurance and Management: The PDCA Cycle as a Complementary Mechanism

Management is responsible for distributing roles, preparing budgets, and executing the institution's day-to-day programmes. However, management requires quality assurance to function as a "rear-view mirror" and a "road map": quality assurance examines whether the team's working methods already conform to the established SOP. In other words, management makes the wheel turn, while quality assurance ensures that the wheel turns in the right direction, without slipping. The relationship between the two functions is most clearly observed within the daily work cycle known as Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA), originally developed by W. Edwards Deming as a framework for continuous quality improvement and subsequently adapted extensively to educational settings. Diagram 2 summarises how management and quality-assurance responsibilities are distributed across the four stages of the cycle.

PLAN	DO	CHECK	ACT
Management prepares the institutional work plan and quality targets.	Management and staff execute the plan in daily operations.	Quality assurance examines the results of the work against the established standard.	Quality assurance provides recommendations for improvement, which management then re-plans.

Diagram 2. Distribution of management and quality-assurance responsibilities across the PDCA cycle

Without management, quality assurance becomes merely a stack of regulatory documents with no one to execute them; without quality assurance, management works without direction and without a means of ascertaining whether its results are good or otherwise. When the two functions are well integrated, the reviewed literature indicates that institutions experience three concrete benefits, summarised in Table 4.

Benefit	Description
More efficient work	Reduces avoidable errors that would otherwise cost the institution time and resources to correct.
Consistent results	The quality of services or academic output remains stable regardless of which staff member performs the task.
Increased trust	Learners, parents, and the wider community experience consistently the quality that the institution promises (Dasuki, 2024).

Table 4. Benefits of integrating management and quality assurance through the PDCA cycle

Quality Assurance and Work Discipline: A Configuration of Four Institutional Conditions

Quality assurance functions to produce standard operating procedures - the codified rules of quality assurance - yet such procedures remain inert unless institutional members possess work discipline. High work discipline embeds quality-assurance rules into everyday behaviour, while

quality assurance, in turn, helps disciplined staff avoid working without direction by clarifying precisely which quality targets must be achieved. The interaction between the two variables produces a reciprocal effect on the organisation. When quality assurance is implemented with discipline, both minor and serious errors can be prevented before a product or service reaches the learner (a condition the quality-management literature terms "zero defect"); sustained over time, disciplined adherence to quality standards gradually evolves into an organisational "quality culture", in which staff feel a sense of internal responsibility whenever their work falls below the established standard.

Conversely, when either variable is weak, the institution experiences one of two dysfunctional conditions, and when both are weak simultaneously, the institution experiences outright quality failure. These four possible configurations are summarised in the matrix below, consistent with findings on the implementation of internal quality-assurance cycles and teacher work discipline in Indonesian schools.

	Strong Work Discipline	Weak Work Discipline
Strong Quality Assurance	Optimal quality: standards are clear and are consistently enacted in daily practice.	Unrealized standards: the institution holds complete quality documentation (e.g., accreditation manuals), yet actual service quality remains poor because staff are frequently negligent or careless.
Weak Quality Assurance	Directionless compliance: staff are punctual and hard-working, but are uncertain what quality target to pursue, because no clear standard has been set.	Quality failure: neither clear standards nor consistent execution exist, resulting in the most severe risk to institutional quality.

Diagram 3. Institutional configurations arising from the interaction between quality-assurance strength and work-discipline strength

This matrix illustrates that quality assurance and work discipline are complementary rather than substitutable: the presence of one without the other leaves institutional quality vulnerable, either to well-documented but poorly executed standards, or to disciplined effort exercised without direction. Sustainable quality in Islamic vocational education therefore requires the deliberate cultivation of both dimensions simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

This review indicates that the relationship between quality assurance and work discipline is complementary and cannot be separated. Quality assurance provides the blueprint - in the form of quality standards - while work discipline supplies the energy of compliance required to execute it. A balanced combination of a sound quality-management system and high work compliance is the principal key for an institution to consistently produce excellent educational outcomes. The analysis further shows that leadership, work systems, and work consistency each occupy a strategic and mutually reinforcing position within this architecture. Visionary and spiritually grounded leadership sets the direction and cultivates a quality culture, a structured work system, anchored in clear SOP, functions as the operational bridge that translates quality policy into daily practice, and work consistency, sustained by the Islamic values of amanah, itqan, and ihsan, ensures that quality is not merely documented but genuinely lived in everyday institutional behaviour. The PDCA cycle, in turn, offers a practical mechanism through which management and quality assurance can

a single, continuously improving system. In practice, various challenges remain in the implementation of quality assurance in Islamic vocational education, including weak leadership, work systems that have not yet been optimally structured, and low consistency and discipline in daily work. These conditions constrain the extent to which the quality of education produced can be maximised. Accordingly, a deeper, empirically grounded examination of the relationship among quality assurance, leadership, work systems, and work consistency remains necessary, so that effective strategies for improving the quality of Islamic vocational education can be identified and validated in specific institutional settings.

As this study is conceptual and library-based in nature, its findings should be read as a theoretical synthesis rather than as empirically tested propositions. Future research is therefore encouraged to validate the relational architecture proposed here through field-based designs - for instance, multi-site case studies or mixed-methods studies conducted at named Islamic vocational schools - so as to test the extent to which the patterns identified in the literature are observable in actual institutional practice.

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