



## Quality Assurance Strategy in Maintaining School Integrity and Community Trust to Strengthen the Foundations of Education Quality

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aims to determine internal and external quality assurance strategies in maintaining school integrity and community trust in order to strengthen the foundation of educational quality. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type of research. Data collection techniques used interviews, observation and document study. The research results show that: (1) the school emphasizes character building and improving internal quality as a strategy to maintain its integrity; (2) transparent communication and promotion of academic achievements through social media are used to build public trust; (3) the strategy used by schools to achieve an A predicate in the accreditation process is to implement team work; (4) the school takes steps to prepare for accreditation which include understanding standards, planning, team formation, submitting applications, simulations, visitations, internal evaluations, and follow-up; and (5) the school received the highest assessment in the accreditation results for the school management component and the quality of graduates. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the internal and external quality assurance strategies implemented by schools are very important to maintain school integrity and community trust in strengthening the foundations of educational quality. Internal quality assurance has a more dominant role in maintaining school integrity and strengthening the foundation of educational quality.*



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### INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance is an important foundation that cannot be ignored in maintaining the quality of education. The quality of a school is not only reflected in the academic achievements of students, but also in the integrity of the institution. School integrity includes aspects such as honesty, transparency and accountability in the educational process. Meanwhile, community trust is the foundation that strengthens the relationship between the school and its environment. According to the results of research conducted by Baharudin & Hasanah (2023), it shows that improving the quality of education in increasing public trust is carried out through an education management process which is focused on four main components, namely the teacher quality assurance system, infrastructure, curriculum and learning development, and increasing community support. . Apart from that, according to Ehren, et al (2020) trust and accountability have a close relationship in the education system. Both are considered important elements that support each other to maintain school integrity and strengthen the quality of education.

Improving the quality of an educational institution is very dependent on ensuring the quality and integrity of the school. Research by Mukhlisin, et al (2024) shows that the school's

internal quality assurance system can be carried out through several stages, such as school evaluation based on education quality reports, improvement of quality planning by setting quality standards, analysis of quality assurance evaluation results, implementation of quality improvement, monitoring, evaluation, and the results of quality improvement after quality improvement has been carried out, as well as quality planning for the future. However, Ehren and Godfrey (2017) highlight that external accountability has an important role in controlling educational quality. This external accountability influences how schools control internal quality and how organizational networks work together. The research results show that external accountability causes schools to be more focused on managing curriculum, assessment and quality improvement efforts. This is because external accountability often comes in the form of evaluation and supervision by educational regulatory bodies or the government. These evaluations often focus on overall school performance. Thus, external accountability is often the main factor that shapes direction and priorities in an educational institution's internal quality assurance efforts.

To achieve optimal school integrity, the central role of the principal is very important in ensuring that this integrity permeates all aspects of school life. This is supported by the research findings of Sandi, et al (2022), which show that the integrity of school principals has a positive impact on the quality of education, trust and loyalty of teaching staff and employees. By improving internal integrity, schools can strengthen the foundations of overall educational quality before shifting their focus to relationships with the community as the next step in strengthening trust in the school and its positive impact on all aspects of school life. Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) emphasize that school strategies for maintaining integrity and community trust must include concrete steps, namely schools must prioritize building and maintaining trust between teachers and principals. This can be achieved through leadership practices that are consistent, transparent, and responsive to school needs. In addition, school principals need to demonstrate leadership behavior that strengthens a positive school climate, including increasing teacher professionalism, increasing academic achievement, and actively involving stakeholders in school activities. It is also important for principals to engage in competent decision-making based on solid knowledge of the academic program, thereby providing confidence to staff and the community about the school's educational direction. By adopting these strategies, schools can strengthen community integrity and trust, which in turn will help improve student achievement and the overall well-being of the school.

Its implementation in schools often finds various problems related to the integrity and trust of the community in schools. One of them is the difficulty in objectively measuring the quality of education, especially in things that cannot be measured with numbers, such as student character and parental satisfaction. Apart from that, limited resources and unequal accessibility of information are also obstacles in ensuring that all schools can follow the quality assurance process properly. In addition, pressure to achieve certain targets can result in unethical practices, such as data manipulation, which can ultimately damage the integrity of the quality assurance system and reduce public trust. Furthermore, most people judge the quality of education from the accreditation score. However, this is not always an accurate measure because there are many manipulative factors that can influence accreditation results. Accreditation is only one aspect of assessing the quality of a school's education, while the actual quality can be measured from the various achievements that the school has achieved.

In general, research relating to quality assurance strategies in maintaining school integrity and community trust in order to strengthen the foundations of educational quality has been carried out by many other researchers, but each research certainly has unique characteristics or differences from other research. For example, research conducted by Mukhlisin, et al (2024) examined the stages of preparing a quality assurance system. On the other hand, research by Ehren and Godfrey (2017) focused on external accountability which has an important role in controlling the quality of education. Meanwhile, research by Sandi, et al (2022), highlights the importance of school principal integrity which can have a positive impact on the quality of education, trust and loyalty, and research by Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015) which emphasizes school strategies for maintaining integrity and public trust. Therefore, there are differences that create a research gap in this research and other research.

The novelty of this research is identifying innovative factors that contribute to ensuring the quality of education with the aim of maintaining school integrity and community trust, as well as strengthening the foundations of educational quality. In this context, this can be done by exploring new strategies or new approaches in ensuring the quality of education that not only consider academic aspects but also non-academic aspects such as student character development and active parental involvement. In addition, this research will also explore how the application of information and communication technology (ICT) can effectively strengthen the education quality assurance system, as well as clarify the role of community participation in building trust in educational institutions.

The urgency of conducting this research is to increase public trust in educational institutions and provide an understanding that the education system not only produces graduates who are highly academically competent, but also have strong character and skills that are relevant to the needs of the times. Theoretically, this research is important because it can provide a new contribution to the literature regarding educational quality assurance strategies. This research examines a comprehensive model by considering academic and non-academic aspects, as well as information and communication technology (ICT) as a supporting tool. This provides new insights into how these elements can be integrated to achieve a more holistic and reliable quality of education. Practically, the results of this research can provide guidance for policy makers, school principals, and educational practitioners in designing and implementing effective quality assurance strategies. Implementation of the proposed strategy can help schools maintain integrity, increase public trust, and ultimately strengthen the quality of education. Thus, this research not only contributes to the development of theory in educational quality assurance, but also offers practical solutions that can be implemented to face challenges in maintaining and improving educational quality at various levels and types of schools.

## METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type of research which aims to understand in depth the analysis of quality assurance in maintaining school integrity and community trust in order to strengthen the foundations of educational quality. This research was conducted at one of the Senior High Schools located in Pasuruan Regency. Data collection techniques use interviews, observation and document study. The process of obtaining information data begins with the identification of a key informant who is the starting point in collecting information. The key informant in this research was the school principal.

The data analysis technique used is the Miles and Huberman model. According to Miles, et al., (2014) this analysis technique model consists of 3 stages, namely data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing. The first step, namely data condensation, includes the activity of selecting from all data sets, then re-selecting data that is relevant to the formulation of the problem and the objectives of the research. The second step, namely data presentation, aims at simplifying and displaying the data in the form of an organized presentation so that researchers can compile and obtain an overview of quality assurance analysis in maintaining school integrity and community trust in order to strengthen the foundations of educational quality. The final step, namely drawing conclusions, is the final step in producing research results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### **Internal Quality Assurance Strategy in Maintaining School Integrity and Community Trust**

A private educational institution based on Islamic boarding schools located in Pasuruan Regency was founded about five years ago. In 2019-2021, students from this institution were officially enrolled in other schools because the new institution's licensing was issued in 2021. However, the number of students at this institution is relatively large, even though the institution's

status is not yet accredited. This indicates that the institution has strong appeal among the public, although it is still faced with challenges related to legality and accreditation.

Based on the results of interviews with the school principal, one of the strategies implemented by the school to maintain its integrity is to emphasize character formation as the main aspect, especially because this school is based on an Islamic boarding school. In this context, schools make character aspects a priority, believing that good character is the main foundation for academic success. This approach is in accordance with the Islamic boarding school philosophy which emphasizes the importance of moral and ethical formation in education. Therefore, the school is committed to paying special attention to developing student character, believing that this will strengthen the integrity of the school and create a learning environment of balance and integrity. The school determines three components of graduate qualifications which are the main benchmarks. First, students are expected to have an adequate understanding of the Islamic religion. Second, students are expected to be able to excel in academic and non-academic fields. And third, students are expected to have an entrepreneurial spirit. These three components are in line with the school's vision to produce a generation with moral character, creativity and broad insight.

The strategy carried out by schools to maintain good integrity in the eyes of the community is to improve the quality of education starting from internal improvements, especially in terms of the quality of human resources. In this context, improving the quality of human resources is the main focus, because quality teachers are the main foundation in providing quality education. Schools not only focus on improving the quality of human resources through training and professional development programs, but also maintain the quality of human resources by providing continuous guidance by teachers, especially in the learning process. By ensuring that teachers continue to be given support and guidance to improve the quality of their teaching. Apart from that, the school also implements a policy of assessing teacher learning carried out by students, so that students can provide suggestions if there are teacher deficiencies in carrying out the learning process. In addition, schools also record teacher absences and attendance during teaching to monitor empty teaching hours. This step was taken to reduce the possibility of empty hours in class, so that each teacher has an attendance percentage that corresponds to the specified number of teaching hours in one week. If a teacher cannot attend school due to illness or other reasons, the school has a policy that requires the teacher to find a substitute who will fill the gap in the learning process.

Meanwhile, the school's strategy for maintaining public trust is to implement transparent communication, in this case the school always pays attention to communication relations with external parties such as student guardians. The school always conveys the progress of its students to the student's parents on a regular basis. This is usually done via a Whatsapp group, apart from that the school also facilitates meetings with student guardians which are held occasionally during scheduled visits. In this case, the school facilitates the student's guardians to meet with the homeroom teacher, and the homeroom teacher conveys the progress of each student. The things conveyed include the number of student violation points, student achievement in learning, as well as evaluation of student attitudes and behavior at school. Through this approach, schools not only convey information, but also facilitate the active involvement of parents in their children's education, which ultimately strengthens parents' sense of trust and involvement in the educational process.

Apart from that, the strategy used by the school to build a positive image and build public trust is to actively share all school activities through social media and student parent groups. In this case, what the school is highlighting is related to its excellence, especially consistent academic achievement every year. To achieve this, the school applies an approach that integrates all school components, including the curriculum team, public relations, student affairs, quality assurance (teacher quality assurance), and infrastructure, as one unified system. Each team has its own role and can work together to achieve the same goal, namely achieving superior quality education. All teams become one inseparable unit and encourage each other to achieve their performance targets. For example, the public relations team needs student achievements to publish school branding, so the public relations team must motivate the student team to encourage student participation in competition activities. Meanwhile, the curriculum team ensures that the learning process achieves

success, while the quality assurance team is responsible for teacher quality which can influence student achievement. Meanwhile, the infrastructure team ensures that all learning support needs are met. By working as an integrated team, schools can achieve the desired quality of education, which can build an image that radiates public confidence in the school.

Schools implement various steps to maintain the quality and quality of education, one of which is through quality mapping carried out internally. This quality mapping involves all school members in reviewing the National Education Standards (SNP), filling out the School Self-Evaluation (EDS), and analyzing the results of monitoring from the previous year carried out by the School Principal. The school formed a School Development Team (TPS) to formulate the steps needed to fulfill quality standards based on the results of previous school self-evaluations and referring to 8 national education standards as a basis. This formulation process involves various elements within the school, including education staff, quality assurance team, school committee, and student parents who have experience in managing educational institutions. Next, the school principal together with educators and education staff, as well as the school committee, conduct a SWOT analysis to analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, and determine policy direction in improving the overall quality of the school. Each school development team works based on a predetermined quality document. The school also carries out a monitoring and evaluation system that is focused on improving school quality by referring to National Education Standards. SWOT analysis is used to formulate programs for the following year, taking into account the identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. The results of this analysis become the basis for schools to establish new quality standards in the subsequent implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System.

### **External Quality Assurance Strategy in Maintaining School Integrity and Community Trust**

Based on the results of interviews with the school principal, even though the school has been inaugurated in 2021, it will only carry out accreditation in 2023. This is because one of the prerequisites for accreditation is that the school must have graduated students. The school succeeded in achieving an A rating in its first accreditation process with a score of 92. This is because the school always maintains the quality from the internal perspective of the institution, so that the quality from the external perspective follows.

One of the strategies used by schools to achieve this title is to implement teamwork. Where most teachers have never had previous experience regarding school accreditation, so this process becomes a moment where they learn together and provide support for each other to achieve the best school standards. Schools also actively seek information regarding the application and implementation system for accreditation. Thus, solid internal collaboration and proactive external knowledge efforts are the foundation for schools to maintain their integrity as quality educational institutions.

Even though a school may have good quality internally, the accreditation process is still needed as a formal step to add official legality regarding quality assessment. By following a transparent and open accreditation process, schools can demonstrate their commitment to maintaining high standards of educational quality to the community. Because it does not require the possibility of public assessment regarding assessing the quality of schools based on their accreditation scores, this step is one of the supports for increasing public trust in educational institutions. Apart from that, the implementation of accreditation is not only a means of increasing public confidence in schools as quality educational institutions, but also provides assurance that the school has gone through an independent assessment that validates its quality and integrity. Thus, an external quality assurance strategy not only strengthens the school's reputation in the eyes of the community, but also provides a strong foundation for maintaining its integrity in the long term.

The steps taken by schools to prepare for the accreditation process begin with the school principal and the management team understanding the accreditation standards issued by the accreditation agency, called the IASP instrument. Next, the school plans to prepare for the accreditation process by holding a coordination meeting of the school management team, followed by a meeting involving all school stakeholders. After that, the school formed a school accreditation

team, with each of the 4 school accreditation components having its own person in charge. Then, the school submits an application for accreditation by sending documents via the Sispena application, and also sending an application letter to BAN-SM for a visitation. Before the visitation is carried out, the school carries out a simulation to prepare staff and ensure that all procedures and requirements are met before the actual accreditation evaluation is carried out. The accreditation visit was carried out for two days. On the first day, there is an interview process and document checking, so that when there are documents that need to be revised the school can make improvements on the second day. On the second day, an assessment of the learning process was carried out and observations of school conditions were carried out. After the accreditation process is complete, the school also carries out an internal evaluation and follow-up on the results of input from assessors.

Based on the results of the analysis of the implementation of accreditation, among the 4 components in the accreditation instrument, namely learning quality, graduate quality, teacher quality and school management, those that received the highest assessment were school management and graduate quality. This is because school management is the main milestone in carrying out school management effectively and efficiently. Good quality school management will ensure that all aspects of school activities, from curriculum planning to human resource management, run smoothly and in coordination. In addition, a high assessment of the quality of graduates shows that the school has succeeded in achieving the ultimate goal of education, namely producing quality graduates both in terms of knowledge and skills, and ready to continue to the next level or enter the world of work. Even though the process towards the quality of graduates is good, the school's shortcomings are still found in the results of graduate tracer studies. This is due to school policy factors which determine three options for students after graduating, namely serving in an Islamic boarding school, working, and continuing to college. This year, the largest percentage of graduates chose to serve, so proportionally, the percentage of graduate quality from tracer study results is relatively low.

## **Discussion**

### **Internal Quality Assurance Strategy in Maintaining School Integrity and Community Trust**

The strategy adopted by the school to maintain its integrity is to emphasize character formation as the main aspect, which is in accordance with the Islamic boarding school philosophy. This reflects the school's commitment to developing students' morals and ethics. This approach is in accordance with character education theory which emphasizes the importance of developing moral values in education. This is in accordance with the research results of Karyono, et al (2019) that schools that emphasize character building in their students tend to have a high level of integrity. The implementation of character education can be integrated through the learning process by emphasizing sustainable positive habits. This is reinforced by the opinion of Ahmad & Rochimah (2021) that behavioral integrity and trust are the keys to improving the quality of education. Quality teaching depends on the identity and integrity of the teacher. Teachers who have integrity will set an example for students, prevent academic dishonesty, and ensure optimal quality of education. Integrity is also an important attribute for a teacher, considering his role as a quality educator. By maintaining integrity in behavior and actions, teachers can make a positive contribution in shaping students' character and morality.

Apart from that, the main focus of schools in maintaining good integrity in the eyes of the community can be done through internal improvements, namely improving the quality of education through improving the quality of human resources, especially teachers. Improving the quality of human resources is carried out through a continuous coaching process. This is reinforced by the opinion of Syukkur & Fauzan (2021) that teachers are the key to the success of an educational institution, whether a teacher's behavior or teaching procedures are bad will greatly influence the image of an educational institution. Therefore, developing teacher competency needs to be carried out to improve the quality of education. Apart from that, the school also implements a policy of assessing teacher learning carried out by students, so that students can provide suggestions if there are teacher deficiencies in carrying out the learning process. In this way, schools not only focus on internal efforts to improve the quality of human resources, but also ensure that the needs and

expectations of students as the main customers of education remain the main focus in every action and policy taken. This is confirmed by the results of research conducted by Ali, et al (2016) that good educational services, especially related to the learning process, are an important element in maintaining school integrity. The quality of educational services provided by schools to students contributes to student satisfaction and the image of the institution. Good educational services, such as quality teaching, appropriate guidance, and quick response to student needs, can strengthen public trust in schools. Thus, good educational services not only increase student satisfaction, but also strengthen the integrity of the school in the view of society. This is in line with the education management approach which emphasizes the importance of service quality in increasing competitiveness and maintaining student loyalty.

An internal quality assurance strategy that focuses on implementing transparent communication between schools and external parties can be an effective step in maintaining public trust. By opening clear communication channels to interact with student parents and school committees, schools create opportunities for parents' active participation in the educational process. This is in accordance with the findings of Delgado-Galindo, et al (2024), which highlights the importance of close relationships between schools and parents in increasing the effectiveness of education, where active parental participation in schools plays an important role in improving the quality of the education system as a whole. This is reinforced by Lee & Li (2021) that the effectiveness of transparent communication plays a role in building public trust by including three important aspects in its implementation, namely the substance of information, accountability and participation.

An effective strategy implemented by the school in building a positive image of the school and increasing public trust by highlighting the school's excellence, especially in consistent academic achievement. To achieve this, the school integrates all school components, such as the curriculum team, public relations, student affairs, quality assurance, and infrastructure, in one unified system providing a solid foundation for achieving superior quality education. This is in line with the results of research conducted by Fadhli which shows that teamwork in schools is the factor that contributes most to improving school quality. Teamwork is formed through an agreement between school members, including teachers, school leaders (principals), and education staff. This is reinforced by Meredith, et al (2023), who state that by implementing teamwork, teachers can easily receive information, suggestions and social support from each other, which in turn can increase their commitment to the organization. Information and social support are considered important aspects of the work environment that help achieve organizational goals.

Schools in implementing internal quality assurance are carried out through several stages, namely internal quality mapping, forming a School Development Team, preparing a quality plan using SWOT analysis, implementing quality, as well as a monitoring and evaluation system, as well as establishing quality standards to improve the quality of education based on National Education Standards. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Wartini, et al (2019) which emphasizes the importance of the quality assurance system cycle, which includes quality mapping, preparation of compliance plans, implementation of quality compliance, quality evaluation/audit, and setting standards through SNP. Meanwhile, the results of research conducted by Mulyasa (2018) show that there are seven stages in implementing internal quality assurance, including standard setting, implementation, monitoring, self-evaluation, internal quality audit, correction formula, and quality improvement to ensure stakeholder satisfaction. Although there are variations in the stages and terms used, the overall process aims to improve the quality of education and ensure stakeholder satisfaction.

### **External Quality Assurance Strategy in Maintaining School Integrity and Community Trust**

Based on the results of the interview, the school succeeded in achieving an A rating in its first accreditation process in 2023, even though the school was only inaugurated in 2021. This success was achieved through a strategy of implementing solid teamwork, where teachers learn together and provide support to each other. others to achieve the best school standards. Strong internal collaboration and active external information seeking are the foundations for schools to

maintain their integrity as quality educational institutions. This is in accordance with the opinion of Aziz, et al (2018) that the importance of involvement of all members in the organization is a key factor in improving overall quality. Teamwork supported by division of tasks according to abilities and self-recognition is the key to improving the quality of institutional work. Thus, harmonious collaboration and increased productivity are the foundation for achieving the highest quality standards in education. This is reinforced by the research results of Asy'ari, et al (2021) that the awareness, responsibility and cooperation of the entire accreditation team contributes to the smooth implementation of accreditation. Strong support from the foundation, management and school committee also contributed to the success of this process.

Even though the school already has good quality internally, the accreditation process is still important to provide official legality regarding quality assessments. This step not only shows the school's commitment to maintaining high quality standards, but also increases public trust in educational institutions through independent assessments that validate their quality and integrity. As a result, external quality assurance strategies not only strengthen a school's reputation, but also build a solid foundation for maintaining its integrity in the long term. This is in line with the opinion of Septian (2022) that apart from emphasizing quality, parents also consider the image or reputation of the school. A positive school image is an important factor in parents' decisions, indicating that the credibility of educational institutions also influences school choice. Therefore, the school accreditation process can be a factor that strengthens the positive image of a school, because accreditation is an independent assessment that confirms the quality and integrity of an educational institution. This is reinforced by the research results of Hasanah, et al (2021) which confirms that accreditation results are an indicator of school quality that is easily understood by the public, which contributes to increasing their trust in the assessment of the quality of education in Indonesia. The accreditation process provides assurance to the public that the implementation of education in schools is in accordance with the standards set by the government, and the accreditation score also influences the public's interest in choosing a school for their children.

The school's steps in carrying out accreditation preparations begin with understanding the standards, planning preparations for the accreditation process, forming a school accreditation team, submitting an application for accreditation, carrying out accreditation simulations, carrying out accreditation visits, carrying out internal evaluations and follow-up. This is in line with the results of research conducted by Afridoni (2022) that in implementing accreditation for educational units, it is necessary to pay attention to school accreditation management which includes planning, forming an accreditation team, implementing accreditation, as well as monitoring and evaluation by a team of assessors. This is reinforced by the opinion of Nurkomariah & Mirnawati (2023), that school accreditation management is a step taken by educational units to manage the accreditation process so that it runs smoothly and reflects the quality of education. Accreditation management begins with planning an accreditation-based program, forming an accreditation team, completing a self-evaluation, as well as visitation activities carried out by a team of assessors to ensure conformity with the data from the self-evaluation, as part of the monitoring and evaluation function.

## CONCLUSION

The school implements a holistic internal and external quality assurance strategy to maintain integrity and build community trust. The research results show that: (1) the school emphasizes character building and improving internal quality as a strategy to maintain its integrity; (2) transparent communication and promotion of academic achievements through social media are used to build public trust; (3) the strategy used by schools to achieve an A predicate in the accreditation process is to implement team work; (4) the school takes steps to prepare for accreditation which include understanding standards, planning, team formation, submitting applications, simulations, visitations, internal evaluations, and follow-up; and (5) the school received the highest assessment in the accreditation results for the school management component and the quality of graduates. Internal quality assurance has a more dominant role in maintaining school integrity and strengthening the foundation of educational quality. Meanwhile, external quality assurance through the accreditation process helps increase public confidence in the quality

of education. The implication of this research finding is the importance of continuously strengthening internal quality assurance, especially in terms of developing student character and developing the quality of human resources. In addition, increasing the participation of student parents in their children's education and close monitoring of the accreditation process are key in strengthening public trust and maintaining high school integrity. Thus, collaboration between internal and external school quality assurance, supported by open communication and solid teamwork, becomes a solid foundation for maintaining and improving the quality of education.

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