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Cyclical and Value-Based Quality Assurance: A Case Study of a Religious Program at an Islamic Senior High School in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how an Islamic senior high school in Indonesia implements a cyclical, participatory quality assurance (QA) model to strengthen educational outcomes. It addresses the need for context-responsive QA systems in faith-based institutions, where religious values and global standards must be harmonized. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research draws upon interviews, observations, and document analysis involving school leaders, teachers, and students at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta. Data were examined through thematic analysis to uncover institutional strategies and stakeholder interactions in QA implementation. Ethical approval was obtained, and reflexivity was maintained to ensure trustworthiness. The findings highlight a five-phase QA cycle that includes mapping, planning, implementation, evaluation, and renewal. These processes are rooted in theological values while incorporating student participation. Several institutional mechanisms, such as digital dashboards, student surveys, electronic report cards, and curriculum review forums, contributed to strengthening graduate achievements in university admissions, academic competitions, and bilingual proficiency. The participatory approach cultivated shared accountability among stakeholders, fostering a culture of quality that integrates spiritual formation with academic excellence. This research presents a contextually grounded model of quality assurance for Islamic education. It enhances the traditional PDCA cycle by embedding moral and spiritual accountability and inclusive governance. The study advances discourse on integrating religious principles into QA frameworks while addressing contemporary educational standards and diverse stakeholder expectations. Although the findings are specific to one Islamic senior high school in Java, the model provides valuable insights for other faith-based institutions seeking to build participatory and value-oriented QA systems in resource-limited contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Educational quality has become a contested discourse in the Global South where schools must navigate between inherited traditions and the accelerating demands of modernization. Global frameworks such as UNESCO's *Education 2030 Agenda* and Southeast Asia's quality benchmarks not only prescribe reform but also articulate expectations that local institutions must negotiate carefully (Dyusheeva et al., 2025; Yuan et al., 2021). In Indonesia, this imperative has shaped the agenda of the National Accreditation Board for Primary and Secondary Education (BAN-PDM), which now promotes internal QA cycles integrating academic standards, ethical formation, community participation, and digital responsiveness (Iskarim et al., 2025). For Islamic education, however, such alignment raises a fundamental concern: can quality be standardized without eroding the distinct moral architectures that underpin religious schooling? (Anwar et al., 2019; Warta et al., 2023).

The notion of moral architectures requires further clarification and grounding in existing scholarship. It refers to the layered ethical frameworks, pedagogical values, and relational patterns through which Islamic schooling sustains its distinctiveness (Ainiyah et al., 2025; Fikri et al., 2025; Jannah et al., 2023; Kuncorowati et al., 2025; Srinio et al., 2025). These moral foundations encompass the embedding of piety in curricula, the authority of teachers as moral exemplars, and the communal rituals that form the social fabric of pesantren and madrasah (Ma`arif et al., 2025; Nasution et al., 2024; Yamin et al., 2023). Scholars argue that these architectures are integral to the credibility of faith-based schools and cannot easily be translated into performance indicators (A et al., 2024; Afidah et al., 2022; Juhaeni et al., 2021; Shittu et al., 2025). Similar concerns are echoed in studies of Islamic educational leadership that emphasize the role of prophetic ethics in shaping institutional legitimacy (Arar et al., 2023; Hermawan et al., 2025; Prasojo et al., 2023; Purhasanah, 2024). By elaborating moral architectures as both ethical orientation and pedagogical practice, this study situates the tension between global frameworks and local values not as a barrier but as a generative space for theorizing quality.

Understanding QA as cyclical and participatory becomes crucial in contexts where education extends beyond knowledge transfer toward the cultivation of piety, social responsibility, and communal identity. Experiences from Jordan, Iraq, and Bangladesh reveal the struggles of Islamic schools to align doctrinal commitments with performance metrics (Ali et al., 2021; Freeh & Hussein, 2021). These struggles indicate not rejection but alternative imaginations of what quality means. Literature increasingly emphasizes that internal QA rooted in contextual reflexivity and participatory governance is more sustainable than externally imposed frameworks (Rahminawati & Supriyadi, 2023a). In pesantren and madrasah, QA must therefore be attentive to intangible domains such as character formation, student agency, and leadership cultivation (Afidah et al., 2022; Juhaeni et al., 2021; Yuliana et al., 2025). This view resonates with global debates on outcome-based education but re-centers the principle of value before metric (Chen et al., 2024; Mtawa et al., 2021). These cross-national dynamics underscore that sustaining quality in Islamic education is inseparable from the continuous reinterpretation of values amid modern pressures, a lens that invites a more attentive reading of the Indonesian context.

Within this debate, the Madrasah Aliyah Program Keagamaan (MAPK) represents not only a state-led initiative but also a pedagogical experiment. MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta integrates Islamic sciences, general education, and bilingual instruction within a boarding system that prioritizes character formation and intercultural literacy. What distinguishes MAPK is its plural ecology, bringing together students and teachers from diverse Islamic orientations including Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and Salafi in dialogical coexistence (El Widdah, 2022). This makes MAPK a generative case for

examining how Islamic schooling reconciles epistemic traditions with the regulatory demands of the state.

The theoretical foundation of QA is often traced to the PDCA (Plan Do Check Act) cycle, which promotes continuous improvement through structured planning, implementation, and feedback (Deming, 2000; Sallis, 2002). Adaptation of PDCA in Islamic boarding schools requires sensitivity to value-based goals, ensuring that systematic evaluation aligns with theological commitments (Muljawan et al., 2023). Empirical evidence from Indonesian madrasah demonstrates that PDCA and TQM improve workflow, teacher competence, and student achievement while retaining religious ethos (Mukhopadhyay, 2020; Suriyati et al., 2023). These studies affirm that procedural reforms can coexist with pedagogical uniqueness if embedded in moral-spiritual accountability (Afidah et al., 2022).

Participatory governance is another central dimension of effective QA. Quality in Islamic education emerges through deliberation involving students, teachers, parents, and communities rather than being dictated exclusively by external authorities (Anwar et al., 2019; Arar et al., 2023). This resonates with the Islamic principle of shura, which frames consultation as both a spiritual and pedagogical ideal. Empirical studies confirm that participatory planning enhances institutional legitimacy, relevance, and sustainability (Sahrodi & and Karim, 2025). Literature on quality culture also emphasizes that internalization of shared values, strong leadership, and formative assessment practices are more decisive than reliance on mechanical metrics (Al Jaber, 2022; Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2020; Ikhwan et al., 2025; Tam, 2001).

Scholarship on QA in religious education increasingly argues for models that integrate cultural and religious specificities with global accountability standards. Structured internal audits aligned with Islamic ethics have shown the potential to harmonize religious commitments and academic objectives (Ayuhan et al., 2022; Freeh & Hussein, 2021). Feedback loops involving diverse stakeholders strengthen resilience and adaptability (Rahminawati & Supriyadi, 2023b). Even managerial models such as TQM and Six Sigma have been localized to faith-based contexts without detaching from spiritual mandates (Dyusheeva et al., 2025; Warta et al., 2023). Such cases demonstrate that QA in Islamic schooling is not merely a matter of compliance but an ethical integration sensitive to context.

Recent research has begun to connect QA with graduate outcomes in Islamic education. Career Registration Methodology provides tools for aligning curricula with employability measures and alumni tracking (Lin-Stephens et al., 2024). Digital platforms encourage reflective practice and long-term academic autonomy (Heymann et al., 2022). Project-based learning infused with spiritual narratives contributes to identity formation in faith-based institutions (Lessky & Dollinger, 2025). Integrated models such as Competency Spirituality Agency highlight holistic graduate readiness (Chen et al., 2024), while service-learning approaches foster civic and religious engagement (Mtawa *et al*., 2021. Despite these contributions, few studies have examined how these dimensions converge in a coherent QA framework at the secondary level, leaving a significant research gap.

This study responds to that gap by investigating how MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta designs and enacts an internal QA cycle that integrates student voice, digital infrastructure, and theological purpose. It examines how quality is cultivated not only through compliance but through relational processes of feedback, negotiation, and institutional responsiveness. By tracing how MAPK fuses religious values, participatory feedback, and technological mediation, this study advances a grounded theorization of quality in Islamic education. It argues that QA, when internalized through ritual, relationship, and institutional will, becomes an ethic of care that emphasizes meaning over compliance and value over surveillance.

METHODS

Research Context and Design

This study employed a qualitative single case study approach to examine the internal quality assurance (QA) practices at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta, one of Indonesia's oldest and most reputable Islamic senior high schools with a pesantren-based boarding system. The choice of a single case was theoretically justified because MAPK represents a critical case in which the integration of Islamic sciences, bilingual pedagogy, and modern governance provides an exemplary institutional laboratory for QA in faith-based education. Such a context allows researchers to generate analytical generalizations rather than statistical ones, providing depth and contextual sensitivity (Cresswell, 2017). While the focus on a single institution may limit breadth, it enables a nuanced understanding of how QA mechanisms are embedded in institutional culture and practice.

Participants and Data Collection

Participants were selected through purposive sampling with explicit criteria: (a) active involvement in QA planning, implementation, or evaluation, (b) minimum of three years' teaching or administrative experience for staff, and (c) active enrolment for at least two years for student participants. Fourteen informants were recruited consisting of the principal, vice principal for curriculum, dormitory head, seven teachers from both Islamic and general subjects, and six Grade 11 students. These roles ensured representation across decision-making, teaching, and learning perspectives. Table 1 presents the distribution of informants according to their institutional roles and categorical designations.

Table 1. Informant Profile of MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta

Code	Position
INF-KAMAD	Head of School
INF-WAKA	Vice Principal for Curriculum
INF-ASR	Dormitory Head
INF-GUR1	English Teacher
INF-GUR2	Qur'anic Exegesis Teacher
INF-GUR3	Hadith & Tafsir Teacher
INF-GUR4	English Teacher
INF-GUR5	Islamic Jurisprudence Teacher
INF-GUR6	Islamic History Teacher
INF-GUR7	Islamic History Teacher
INF-SIS1	Grade 11 Student
INF-SIS2	Grade 11 Student
INF-SIS3	Grade 11 Student
INF-SIS4	Grade 11 Student
INF-SIS5	Grade 11 Student
INF-SIS6	Grade 11 Student

Data collection was conducted over a ten-day fieldwork period (28 November–8 December 2024). To mitigate the short duration, several strategies were applied. These included pre-field communication with the institution, continuous access to QA-related documents, and extended digital follow-up with key informants after fieldwork. Three complementary techniques were used: semi-structured interviews focusing on QA processes, classroom and dormitory observations, and document analysis of QA reports, lesson plans, curriculum guides, and student performance records. All interviews were recorded with consent and subsequently transcribed verbatim. NVivo software was employed for data management and coding to enhance analytic traceability.

Data Analysis and Validation

Thematic analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, comprising data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, A. Michael , Saldana, 2018). Open and axial coding were aligned with the five-phase QA cycle identified in the literature and institutional practices. Codes were iteratively refined through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents. Data conflicts were addressed through a process of comparison and resolution. Discrepancies between accounts were revisited with informants, discussed with peer researchers, and cross-checked against institutional records.

To strengthen validation, member checking was conducted at two levels, namely individual confirmation during interviews and a focus group discussion (FGD) with teachers and administrators at the end of fieldwork. In addition, peer debriefing with fellow researchers and audit trails such as coding logs, analytic memos, and observation notes enhanced credibility and dependability. This multi-layered strategy reduced overreliance on a single FGD and ensured more robust trustworthiness of findings.k. The analysis process is illustrated in Figure 1.

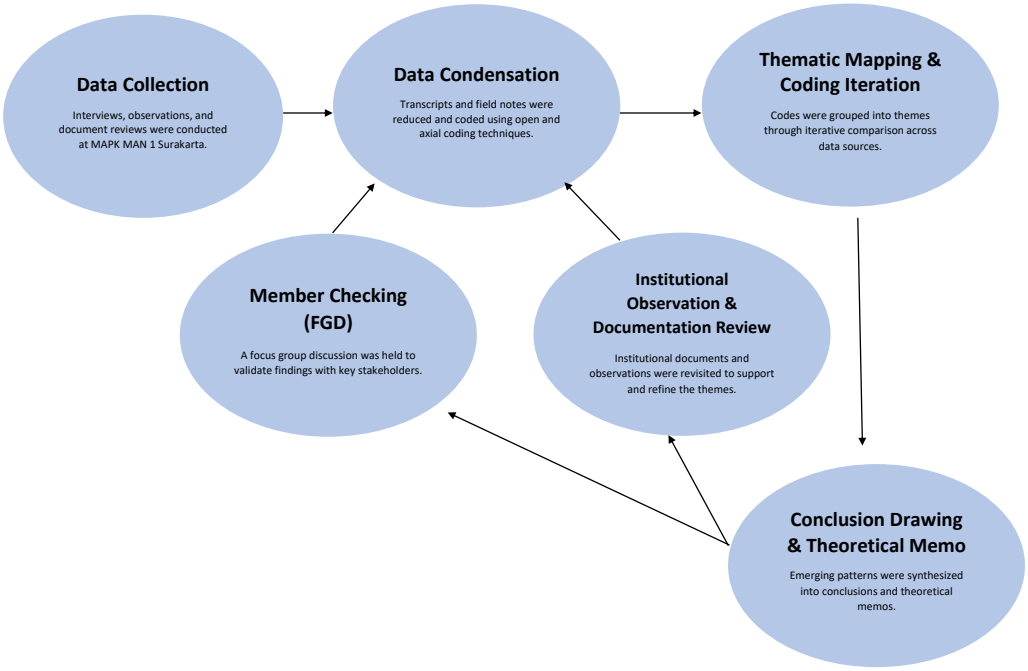


Figure 1. Thematic Analysis Process in This Study.
Source: *Authors' own work (2025)*

Research Rigor and Ethics

Methodological rigor was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, systematic memoing, and the use of (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) trustworthiness criteria. The researcher's positionality as a male academic outsider was explicitly acknowledged. This positionality posed both challenges such as limited access to the perspectives of female students and opportunities such as an external analytical distance. Reflexivity was continuously practiced by recording positionality memos and discussing emerging interpretations with institutional gatekeepers.

Ethical clearance was formally granted by the UIN Sunan Kalijaga Research Ethics Committee under Reference Number B.05/4/CRP/EC/X/2024. All participants signed informed consent forms, and anonymity was ensured through coded identifiers. The transparency of ethical procedures and

reflexive acknowledgment of the researcher's positionality reinforced both accountability and replicability of the study.

FINDINGS

A Cyclical QA Model Based on Stakeholder Mapping

The internal quality assurance (QA) system at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta is organised around five interlinked phases: needs mapping, participatory planning, integrative implementation, continuous evaluation, and adaptive renewal. At first glance, this cycle resembles the conventional PDCA (Plan–Do–Check–Act) framework (Deming, 2000; Sallis, 2002). Yet the conceptual differentiation lies in its epistemic grounding. Whereas PDCA tends to be procedural and technocratic, MAPK's model is infused with Islamic values and pesantren culture, situating quality not only as a managerial routine but as a dialogical ethic. Curriculum documents, for instance, are drafted in line with KMA 184/2019 and KMA 347/2022, but undergo iterative consultation with teachers, dormitory leaders, and the regional office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This illustrates a dialectical negotiation between regulatory compliance and spiritual intentionality. "*The document is signed by the head of the madrasah, consulted with the regional office, and revised if it does not yet meet the requirements*." (KAMAD, 2024)

In the planning phase, institutional goals are translated into quality targets that span academic design, extracurricular programming, and scholarship distribution. Rather than treating targets as fixed metrics, MAPK frames them through musyawarah, a participatory deliberation aligned with the Islamic principle of *shura* (Anwar et al., 2019; Arar et al., 2023). This demonstrates a conceptual shift: quality is not reduced to performance indicators but is cultivated as a shared ethic among stakeholders. "*We are required to implement these mandatory programs from student recruitment to the direct disbursement of funds. That is part of our quality assurance*." (KAMAD, 2024)

Implementation further distinguishes MAPK's QA cycle from conventional frameworks. Instruction takes place not only in formal classrooms but also in tutorial sessions and Ma'hadiyah dormitory-based study. This hybrid structure reveals a unique epistemic layering: managerial tools such as peer supervision, CCTV monitoring, and QA committees coexist with practices like collective recitation of the *kutub turath* and dialogical tafsir. Rather than privileging efficiency alone, MAPK integrates traditional pedagogies into its QA system, resisting the depersonalisation often associated with Total Quality Management (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). "*We study the kitab kuning directly, and the practice involves group discussions or classroom presentations*." (SIS03, 2024) "*The ustadz gives us group assignments on tafsir, and then we present and discuss them in class*." (SIS04, 2024)

Evaluation practices extend this hybrid orientation. Data are collected through e-Rapor, university admission records, and stakeholder surveys, echoing evidence-based QA frameworks. Yet in MAPK, these data are not treated as mere audit outputs. They are publicly discussed in forums where teachers, parents, and students negotiate their implications. In this way, quality is reframed as relational responsiveness rather than compliance with external inspection (Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2020). "*We conduct annual public surveys from students, teachers, school committees, to parents... that serves as our informal quality assurance*." (KAMAD, 2024)

The renewal phase signals MAPK's reflexive capacity. Curriculum reforms and pedagogical adjustments are enacted based on outcome data such as competition results and graduate performance. The cycle thus embodies the ethos of *value before metric* (Chen et al., 2024; Mtawa et al., 2021), positioning QA as an iterative ethic of care that is simultaneously spiritual, pedagogical, and managerial. "*We revise the curriculum and teaching strategies based on annual evaluations and outcomes from competitions like Myres and Madrasah Fest*." (WAKA, 2024)

Figure 2 visualises this cyclical model as an interconnected framework that integrates stakeholder input at each phase of the QA process. It affirms that QA at MAPK is neither static nor purely administrative; it is a culturally embedded practice shaped by lived interactions between

documents and dormitories, between regulatory frameworks and the voices of students. In this sense, the QA cycle is not simply an institutional mechanism but a living practice through which quality becomes a shared, reflexive commitment.



Figure 2. The QA Cycle Model of MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta
Source: Authors' own work (2025)

Student Voice as the Engine of Quality Feedback

Student participation forms a foundational pillar of the internal QA system at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta. Rather than positioning students as passive recipients of policy, the school institutionalises multiple feedback channels such as classroom forums, digital surveys, and quarterly evaluation meetings that bring student perspectives into the operational heart of QA. These mechanisms resemble participatory models of educational governance (Anwar et al., 2019; Chaula, 2023), yet what distinguishes MAPK is how such participation is formalised into routine cycles rather than left to ad hoc consultation. The effect is to situate student voice as an engine of feedback rather than a symbolic add-on. "*If we have criticisms about a teacher or a confusing schedule, we share it in the class forum, where it's collected and discussed in the weekly meeting*." (SIS02, 2024)

Monthly class forums moderated by elected student representatives serve as the first tier of deliberation. Concerns about curriculum, discipline, or dormitory management are documented by homeroom teachers and carried into staff coordination sessions. Beyond these face-to-face spaces, MAPK has integrated quarterly digital surveys through Google Forms, covering academic, religious, and administrative domains. The survey data are triangulated with classroom reports and institutional documents, enabling a more systematic incorporation of student perspectives. In this way, the institution moves beyond tokenism, aligning its practices with principles of credibility and confirmability in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). "*We are asked to fill out a Google Form about all aspects, from teachers and facilities to dormitory activities. The results are compiled and reviewed in the quarterly evaluation*." (SIS05, 2024)

The most formalised expression of student participation is the quarterly evaluation meeting, where OSIS (student council) representatives directly convey aggregated student concerns to school leaders. These meetings have produced tangible reforms, from extending library hours to revising curriculum elements and improving campus cleanliness. The immediacy of institutional response signals that student voice is not merely heard but acted upon, thereby transforming feedback into governance.

"Each quarter we have an evaluation meeting. OSIS brings reports from peers. Last time it was about mosque cleanliness, and it was addressed immediately. It made a visible impact." (SIS01, 2024)

Figure 3 illustrates the layered mechanisms through which student feedback circulates in MAPK's QA process. Yet beyond procedural mapping, the critical point lies in the dynamics of power negotiated within these forums. While students are granted institutionalised channels, their agency remains situated within the hierarchical culture of pesantren. The respect accorded to teachers and religious authorities shapes how critique is voiced and received, producing what may be called a negotiated agency rather than autonomous control. In this sense, MAPK demonstrates how student voice can operate reflexively within constraints of tradition, aligning with Islamic pedagogical values of shura while still generating reform (Arar et al., 2023; Sahrodi & and Karim, 2025).



Figure 3. Mechanisms of Student Feedback in the QA Process at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta
Source: Authors' own work (2025)

Thus, student participation at MAPK is not reducible to managerial procedure but becomes a pedagogical ethic. Forums, surveys, and evaluation meetings function as dialogical spaces where critique, authority, and responsibility intersect. Quality assurance, therefore, is not delivered top-down but co-constructed in encounters between policy and lived experience. It is in these negotiated spaces, structured yet relational, that the reflexive character of MAPK's QA system becomes visible, demonstrating that accountability in Islamic education can be both participatory and value-driven.

Curriculum Integration: Religion, Global Skills, and Local Identity

The curriculum at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta embodies a deliberate negotiation between the epistemic legacies of Islamic scholarship and the demands of global modernity. Of the forty-five class hours per week, thirty-one are devoted to Islamic sciences such as tafsir, hadith, ushul fiqh, mantiq, and Arabic grammar, taught directly from classical sources (*kutub turath*). The remaining fourteen hours are allocated to general subjects, including mathematics, civics, and history, aligned with national competency standards. This distribution reflects more than a bureaucratic ratio; it signals an epistemological positioning in which religious sciences retain primacy while secular subjects are contextualised as necessary instruments for higher education and civic participation. "*MAPK has 45 class hours per week, with 70 percent devoted to religious subjects using kitab. The rest are general subjects like math, history, and sociology*." (WAKA01, 2024)

Language development further illustrates this dual epistemology. Through the *Program Pengembangan Bahasa MAPK*, students participate in Arabic and English clubs, dormitory language zones, and extracurricular debates. Arabic immersion reinforces the hermeneutical link to Islamic texts, while English proficiency enables engagement with global academic discourse. This design creates a space where epistemological boundaries blur. Students oscillate between reciting classical commentaries and debating contemporary ethical issues in English, demonstrating that curriculum integration is not merely additive but dialogical. "*On Mondays and Wednesdays we must speak Arabic in the dormitory, and on Fridays we use English. Senior students supervise and document any violations.*" (SIS03, 2024)

The epistemic tensions become visible in student outcomes. Participation in national Arabic contests and English debate championships reflects institutional success, yet beneath these achievements lies a deeper question: does the integration of global competencies dilute or enrich the primacy of revelation-based knowledge? The bilingual scientific writing project exemplifies this negotiation. Students are required to write academic papers in Arabic or English on themes such as environmental fiqh or gender roles in tafsir, drawing upon both turath and contemporary scholarship. In doing so, they enact what can be called an epistemic encounter, where Islamic knowledge is neither subordinated to global paradigms nor isolated from them, but engaged in critical dialogue. "*I wrote an academic paper in Arabic on environmental fiqh. My references included classical kitab and journals, and I presented it at the year-end seminar.*" (SIS06, 2024)

The curriculum at MAPK thus resists compartmentalisation. Religious commitment and global literacy are not taught as separate domains but as overlapping frameworks that continually negotiate meaning. This approach resonates with the notion of *value before metric*, positioning quality not as the mastery of discrete subjects but as the capacity to navigate epistemological plurality. Within this curriculum, students are not only memorising texts or learning formulas; they are being trained to inhabit multiple worlds, embodying both the faqih immersed in turath and the global citizen conversant in English.

In this sense, MAPK's curriculum integration reflects more than compliance with state regulations. It represents an epistemic strategy that harmonises revelation and reason, tradition and transformation. The act of debating Islamic law in English or writing an Arabic paper on digital ethics is not a neutral skill but a pedagogical practice that shapes students' identities as Muslims who are both locally grounded and globally literate. This epistemological hybridity is what anchors MAPK's distinctiveness, demonstrating that curriculum integration in Islamic education is less about balancing hours and more about negotiating intellectual horizons.

Technology for Real-Time Assurance

Digital technologies at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta are embedded within the QA cycle to ensure continuous monitoring and adaptive decision-making. The system includes CCTV surveillance, e-Rapor (electronic report cards), stakeholder surveys via Google Forms, and a digital scholarship management dashboard. On the surface, these tools reflect modern accountability practices, but in the context of Islamic education they raise deeper ethical questions about surveillance, privacy, and the psychological impact of constant monitoring. The institutionalisation of these technologies illustrates both the strengths and tensions of adopting data-driven assurance in a value-based environment. "*We have a system that includes e-Rapor, CCTV, survey forms, and the scholarship dashboard, all of which are utilized for quarterly control and evaluation*." (WAKA01, 2024)

CCTV cameras are installed in classrooms, dormitories, and communal spaces to monitor punctuality, attentiveness, and discipline. Weekly reviews of the footage are used for teacher evaluation and student behaviour control. While this system fosters a sense of discipline and accountability, it also generates an atmosphere of constant visibility that may shape behaviour through fear rather than intrinsic motivation. From an ethical perspective, such surveillance can be seen as conflicting with

Islamic values of *amanah* and trust, where character is ideally cultivated through conscience rather than compulsion. These tensions invite reflection on whether technology reinforces care or reduces educational relationships to observation and control. "*If a teacher is late or a student sleeps in class, it is visible on CCTV. We are more disciplined because we know we are being monitored*." (SIS02, 2024)

The e-Rapor platform, by contrast, represents a more dialogical use of technology. Teachers enter academic scores, attendance, and behavioural notes every two weeks, and parents can access them through monthly links. This tool enables early detection of problems and timely interventions, aligning with formative principles of quality culture (Hildesheim & Sonntag, 2020). Yet even here the ethics of transparency must be balanced with concerns of labelling or overexposure of students' weaknesses. When data visibility is maximised, questions of dignity and psychological pressure emerge, suggesting the need for protocols that protect students' right to confidentiality while still fostering accountability. "*All grades and absences go into e-Rapor, including teacher comments. Parents can access the report through a link sent every month*." (SIS05, 2024)

Stakeholder surveys administered through Google Forms every four months serve as a participatory counterbalance to surveillance. Students, teachers, alumni, and parents provide feedback on curriculum, teaching effectiveness, spiritual activities, and facilities. These surveys generate reforms such as extended library hours and revised dorm cleaning schedules, illustrating how digital tools can facilitate dialogical engagement rather than unilateral control. The ethical strength of this mechanism lies in its inclusivity, which resonates with Islamic principles of *shura* and collective responsibility. "*The Google Form survey covers subjects, teachers, and facilities. The results are presented at the student council meeting and used to revise programs.*" (SIS04, 2024)

The scholarship dashboard adds another layer of transparency by recording funding sources, disbursement dates, and student recipients. This innovation prevents mismanagement and ensures equitable distribution, but it also introduces sensitive questions regarding financial privacy. Students' names and aid status, when overly visible, could create stigma or inequity in peer dynamics. Here again, the ethical imperative is to balance accountability with the preservation of students' dignity. "*All scholarship data, including the amount, status, and recipient names, are neatly recorded in the dashboard. If there is an audit, we can simply open the records*." (WAKA02, 2024)

These dynamics are summarised in Table 2, which outlines how each digital tool supports QA phases while simultaneously raising distinct ethical considerations. The table highlights that technology in Islamic education cannot be reduced to efficiency gains but must also be evaluated in light of privacy, dignity, and the cultivation of trust.

Table 2. MAPK's Real-Time Digital Quality Assurance System

Platform	Main Functions	QA Phase
CCTV & Behaviour Log	Monitor real-time activities, track punctuality, conduct	Monitoring and Formative Review
e-Rapor & Dashboard	Record academic performance, visualise learning gaps	Assessment and Interpretation
Google Form Surveys	Collect stakeholder feedback on programs and facilities	Participatory Evaluation
Scholarship Dashboard	Manage financial aid data transparently	Financial Monitoring and Audit
QA Reporting & Policy	Compile reports and guide leadership decisions	Strategic Decision-Making

By embedding these tools within QA, MAPK demonstrates responsiveness and data-informed governance. Yet the critical point is that technology in Islamic schooling is never neutral. It simultaneously strengthens accountability and reshapes the moral fabric of education. The challenge lies in ensuring that monitoring does not eclipse trust, and that transparency is balanced with mercy.

In this sense, MAPK's technological ecosystem embodies both potential and peril, affirming that quality assurance in Islamic education must always be attentive to its ethical as well as managerial dimensions.

Strong Graduate Outcomes as QA Impact

The reported outcomes of MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta are undeniably impressive, with high rates of university admission, consistent achievements in national competitions, and sustained bilingual proficiency. According to the MAPK 2024 Graduation Summary, 89 percent of final-year students secured placement through selective pathways such as SNBP and SPAN-PTKIN, including entry into competitive programs in Sharia Economics, Islamic Psychology, and International Relations. Yet attributing these results exclusively to the QA system risks overstating causality. The relationship between QA mechanisms and student outcomes is mediated by other variables that must be considered, including the highly selective recruitment of students, the socio-religious capital of the boarding environment, and the role of family support. "*I was accepted into UIN Jakarta through SPAN-PTKIN and also received a Baznas (National Zakat Agency) scholarship because of my grades and competition participation*." (SIS07, 2024)

Competition achievements provide another site where outcomes appear linked to QA structures, such as mentorship sessions and systematic proposal reviews. The MAPK Student Achievement Report (2022–2023) documents national-level recognition in Arabic Olympiad and Myres competitions. These processes are indeed facilitated by QA protocols, yet alternative explanations cannot be dismissed. Students entering MAPK are already among the most academically motivated in their regions, and the school's culture of intensive tutoring and peer accountability may independently contribute to their success. The QA system functions less as a sole determinant than as a scaffolding that amplifies pre-existing capacities. "*I was a national finalist in Myres. My mentor guided me weekly, and we revised the proposal together before submission*." (SIS05, 2024)

Bilingual proficiency, similarly, is cultivated through language clubs, immersion zones, and scientific writing projects. Internal assessments show that these practices support students in maintaining functional skills in academic writing and debate, skills often carried into their university studies. However, one could argue that boarding structures and institutional enforcement of language zones play as significant a role as QA mechanisms themselves. The distinction between cultural habitus and formal assurance systems is blurred, suggesting that outcomes should be read as products of overlapping dynamics rather than linear results of QA. "*Now in college, I am often asked to present in English. Back at MAPK, we trained a lot through debate and writing papers in both Arabic and English.*" (SIS01, 2024)

These reflections highlight that while MAPK's QA processes are clearly embedded in student life, the explanatory claims must be handled cautiously. Strong outcomes may stem from an interplay of selective intake, institutional culture, mentorship traditions, and family encouragement alongside QA protocols. What QA appears to do is formalise and make visible practices that might otherwise remain informal, providing coherence and continuity across the student lifecycle. This interpretive caution avoids post-hoc reasoning and situates QA as one significant factor among many.

Table 3. Graduate Outcomes at MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta: QA Contributions and Alternative Explanations

QA Input Components	QA Process Mechanisms	Graduate Outcomes	Alternative Explanations / Control Variables
Structured Curriculum (70% Religion, 30% General)	Continuous assessment (e-Rapor, evaluation forums)	University entry via SNBP / SPAN-PTKIN	Selective recruitment of students with high baseline competencies
Scientific Writing & Bilingual Clubs	Language immersion, academic forums	Bilingual competence in Arabic and English	Boarding culture and enforced dormitory language zones

QA Input Components	QA Process Mechanisms	Graduate Outcomes	Alternative Explanations / Control Variables
Mentorship & Proposal Coaching	QA review of competition performance	National awards (Myres, Olympiad, KSM)	Student motivation and family support traditions
Digital Monitoring (CCTV, e-Rapor, Dashboard)	Triannual QA meetings and stakeholder surveys	Transparent achievement records and early detection	Culture of discipline in pesantren environments

Graduate outcomes at MAPK, therefore, are best understood as the result of an institutional ecology where quality assurance mechanisms, selective recruitment, and cultural dynamics intersect. Rather than functioning as a singular cause, QA provides coherence and structure that make visible and sustainable practices already embedded in the pesantren tradition. The achievements of graduates emerge from this interplay of formal systems and lived habitus, showing that quality in Islamic education is not a linear product of managerial design but a negotiated reality shaped by multiple forces working together.

DISCUSSION

Quality in Islamic education often resists reduction to audit templates or policy directives. At MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta, quality assurance is not experienced as mechanical adherence to compliance but as a rhythm of planning, reflection, and renewal that draws simultaneously on regulatory standards and internal commitments (Kurniailah & Bakar, 2023; Madkan et al., 2025; Nurdi & Ahmad, 2025). The five-phase QA cycle resembles the PDCA framework (Harvey & Jones, 2022), yet its enactment cannot be detached from the moral and cultural values that circulate in the institution. In this sense, responsiveness emerges not from procedural routines alone but from the tension where regulatory demands meet faith-based intentionality. This reading unsettles earlier claims that Islamic education is incompatible with output-based QA models (Freeh & Hussein, 2021), while also complicating proceduralist accounts that reduce QA to checklists (Ayuhan et al., 2022). The framework recalls arguments in transformative Islamic education that situate quality as the formation of ethical and dialogical persons (Sahin, 2015) and resonates with integrative-interconnective perspectives that call for coherence between revelation, reason, and empirical science (Abdullah, 2014).

The mechanisms of student participation illustrate how these theoretical currents take institutional form. Students are not limited to survey responses but articulate their perspectives in forums, councils, and structured evaluations that enter the decision-making process. Such practices differ from more symbolic modes of participation reported elsewhere (Chaula, 2023), yet they also invite questions about how far such inclusion constitutes genuine agency. The appeal to *shura* positions these practices within Islamic pedagogical traditions of collective reasoning and ethical negotiation (Anwar et al., 2019; Sahrodi & and Karim, 2025), but tensions remain. Unlike Western democratic models of student governance that emphasise autonomy and rights (Cook-Sather, 2006; Fielding, 2011), *shura* presupposes reciprocal accountability within a shared moral horizon. Even so, QA frameworks often retain hierarchical asymmetries that may channel participation toward managerial ends. The result is a fluid dynamic in which feedback loops oscillate between authentic moral dialogue and institutional absorption, sustaining both trust and contestation (Hariadi et al., 2025; Irvine et al., 2024).

Curricular structure further reveals how epistemic negotiations are lived in practice. The formal division of 70 percent religious and 30 percent general subjects conforms to state requirements (Afidah et al., 2022), but the bilingual immersion, peer mentoring, and scientific writing practices extend beyond regulatory compliance. Engagement with *kutub turath* alongside academic debates in Arabic and English signals an attempt to bridge domains of knowledge, yet the encounter is not free from tension (Insani et al., 2024; Triyono et al., 2025). State curricular frameworks often cast general education as a secular complement to Islamic instruction (Juhaeni et al., 2021), while the lived curriculum situates students at the intersection of sacred and modern literacies. Such negotiation resonates with

epistemological critiques that resist compartmentalisation of disciplines (Lessky & Dollinger, 2025) and aligns with the integrative vision that seeks dialogue across revelation, rationality, and science (Subakir, 2020) Rather than achieving seamless synthesis, MAPK's curricular ecology demonstrates how epistemic pluralities are continually negotiated, fragile, and open-ended.

Digital infrastructure at MAPK does not operate as a neutral layer of surveillance but as a contested interface where responsiveness and control intersect. Platforms such as e-Rapor, CCTV, digital surveys, and scholarship dashboards are embedded into cycles of weekly review and intervention, creating opportunities for adaptation as well as risks of overexposure. The very tools that promise transparency also raise ethical questions about privacy and the psychological effects of constant monitoring (). Students and teachers navigate a dual awareness: on the one hand, that data is used to inform care and support, and on the other, that surveillance carries the potential for discipline and anxiety. Earlier critiques of depersonalisation in data-driven systems (Warta et al., 2023) remain relevant here, yet the MAPK case demonstrates that digital technologies can foster trust when deliberately framed as instruments of transparency and formative reflection (Heymann et al., 2022). What emerges is not a technological solution to quality but a relational practice in which the balance between accountability and care must be continually negotiated.

Graduate outcomes provide another lens through which to view this negotiation. High acceptance rates in admission schemes such as SNBP and SPAN-PTKIN, national competition achievements, and sustained bilingual fluency indicate that processes and results are linked through deliberate institutional design. Yet causal connections are not straightforward. Student success is shaped by selective recruitment, mentoring cultures, and the socio-religious capital of the pesantren environment alongside QA mechanisms. Operational traceability shows how QA provides scaffolding for these factors, answering critiques of outcome-disconnected models (Lin-Stephens et al., 2024; Sallis, 2002), but without fully resolving questions of causality. Academic achievement and spiritual formation appear to move in parallel not because of managerial alignment alone, but because of overlapping ecologies of guidance, curriculum, and character education that are difficult to disentangle.

The plural theological affiliations within MAPK further complicate the picture. Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Salafi, and Tarbiyah orientations coexist within the same institutional space, producing moments of both dialogue and latent tension. Diversity is not simply managed as administrative risk (El Widdah, 2022) but enacted as pedagogical dialogue in classrooms, dormitories, and forums where epistemic differences surface. Cohesion emerges less from uniformity than from negotiated understanding, where institutional trust is fragile and must be sustained through encounter. This resonates with accounts of quality as shared commitment and epistemic trust (Arar et al., 2023), yet it also points to the precariousness of such trust in contexts where theological commitments carry power dynamics. Quality, in this sense, is not a stable technocratic ideal but a lived practice of institutional care—formed in negotiation, maintained through reflection, and continually tested in the interplay of plural voices.

Viewed in relation to the preceding analysis, quality assurance at MAPK cannot be reduced to procedures, outcomes, or pluralist accommodations in isolation. It operates as a field of negotiation where theological intentionality, institutional design, digital infrastructures, and communal trust intersect in fragile ways. The discussion has shown how processes of planning, participation, curriculum, technology, outcomes, and pluralism are entangled rather than neatly aligned, producing both coherence and tension (Hamzah et al., 2023; Rofiq et al., 2024; Suryawati et al., 2025; Suwendi et al., 2025). What emerges is not a model that guarantees stability but a dynamic practice of quality sustained through reflection and constant recalibration. This unsettled ground provides the basis for drawing conclusions on how Islamic education can reimagine assurance as an ongoing dialogue rather than a fixed framework.

Practical Recommendations

Student participation in quality assurance is not merely a technical adjustment but a cultural orientation rooted in Islamic values of *shura* and collective accountability. At MAPK, students are not passive beneficiaries of educational policy but active interlocutors whose voices animate the cycles of reflection and reform. Dialogue forums, digital surveys, and inclusive evaluation meetings are not only procedural tools but relational spaces that cultivate trust, attentiveness, and shared responsibility. To deepen this ethos, alumni engagement should move beyond routine tracer studies toward more holistic tracking of graduate competencies, social involvement, and ethical agency. The integration of digital platforms such as cloud-based archives, visual dashboards, and real-time analytics should not be reduced to managerial convenience, but instead viewed as a pathway toward transparent, context-aware, and morally grounded governance in Islamic schooling.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is situated within the distinct socio-cultural landscape of MAPK Surakarta, embedded in an urban Javanese context with particular institutional histories and leadership formations. While it offers meaningful insights, its applicability to other MAPK schools, especially those in rural or non-Javanese regions, should be considered interpretively rather than formulaically. The specificity of this case should not be mistaken for limitation alone but as an invitation for dialogue across diverse educational terrains. Comparative research involving multiple sites and employing longitudinal or mixed methods would enrich our understanding of how QA systems function across varied geographies and theological traditions. In doing so, future studies may illuminate whether participatory and value-oriented models genuinely foster long-term transformations in educational integrity and societal engagement.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a grounded portrait of how an Islamic senior high school operationalizes an internal quality assurance model that is both cyclical and value-driven. At MAPK MAN 1 Surakarta, the QA process unfolds not as a rigid sequence of bureaucratic tasks but as a dialogical practice that connects planning, implementation, evaluation, and renewal with the lived realities of its educational community. Student voice, teacher input, and administrative oversight are not treated as separate domains but converge through forums, surveys, and institutional feedback loops that cultivate responsiveness and collective ownership. The model invites reflection on how Islamic education can harmonize procedural rigor with moral intentionality, making quality not an abstract measure but a shared responsibility embedded in daily practices.

Theoretically, this research extends the PDCA paradigm by demonstrating that institutional accountability need not be divorced from theological ethics or communal engagement. MAPK's model shifts the emphasis from output monitoring to relational participation, where improvement is grounded in trust, reflection, and spiritual relevance. By treating student feedback as formative dialogue rather than data extraction, the school offers a compelling redefinition of quality that moves beyond standardization. This has timely implications for Islamic schools facing increased expectations for transparency and societal contribution. It suggests that Islamic education can retain its spiritual mission while embracing evidence-based mechanisms for growth. As such, quality assurance becomes not just a matter of institutional compliance but a cultural and ethical process through which faith-based schools articulate their commitments to excellence, relevance, and justice in a plural educational landscape.

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