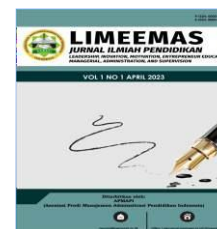


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STRENGTHENING THE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM AS THE FOUNDATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) is designed as the foundation of higher education management that encourages accountability, transparency, and sustainable quality improvement. However, its implementation in many Indonesian universities continues to face various challenges. This study aims to analyze the implementation of SPMI, identify supporting and inhibiting factors for its strengthening, and formulate strategies to ensure SPMI functions effectively as a pillar of institutional governance. Using a qualitative case study design and supported by a systematic literature review, this study collected data through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis across several universities that have implemented SPMI. The findings show that SPMI has been structurally built—with the existence of LPM, quality manuals, and audit cycles—but its implementation tends to be procedural, administrative, and reactive to accreditation needs. The integration of SPMI with strategic planning, budgeting, and operational decision-making is still weak. Key factors supporting SPMI strengthening include leadership commitment, human resource capacity, and a participatory quality culture, while the main obstacles are system fragmentation, limited resources, and negative perceptions within the academic community. This study concludes that SPMI will be an effective management foundation only if it transforms from a compliance mechanism into an integrated, inclusive, and sustainable organizational learning system. The implications of this study provide strategic recommendations for university leaders and policymakers to strengthen SPMI not only as a regulatory formality but also as a living, meaningful quality improvement engine.

Keywords: Internal Quality Assurance System, higher education management, higher education governance, quality culture, education quality assurance

Abstrak: Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal (SPMI) dirancang sebagai fondasi manajemen pendidikan tinggi yang mendorong akuntabilitas, transparansi, dan peningkatan mutu berkelanjutan. Namun, implementasinya di banyak perguruan tinggi Indonesia masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi SPMI, mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambat penguatannya, serta merumuskan strategi agar SPMI dapat berfungsi secara efektif sebagai pilar tata kelola institusi. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus dan didukung oleh tinjauan literatur sistematis, penelitian ini mengumpulkan data melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen di beberapa perguruan tinggi yang telah menerapkan SPMI. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa SPMI telah terbangun secara struktural—dengan keberadaan LPM, manual mutu, dan siklus audit—namun implementasinya cenderung prosedural, administratif, dan reaktif terhadap kebutuhan akreditasi. Integrasi SPMI dengan perencanaan strategis, penganggaran, dan

pengambilan keputusan operasional masih lemah. Faktor kunci yang mendukung penguatan SPMI meliputi komitmen kepemimpinan, kapasitas SDM, dan budaya mutu partisipatif, sedangkan hambatan utamanya adalah fragmentasi sistem, keterbatasan sumber daya, dan persepsi negatif civitas akademika. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa SPMI hanya akan menjadi fondasi manajemen yang efektif jika bertransformasi dari mekanisme kepatuhan menjadi sistem pembelajaran organisasi yang terintegrasi, inklusif, dan berkelanjutan. Implikasi penelitian ini memberikan rekomendasi strategis bagi pimpinan perguruan tinggi dan pemangku kebijakan dalam memperkuat SPMI tidak hanya sebagai formalitas regulasi, tetapi sebagai mesin peningkatan mutu yang hidup dan bermakna.

Kata kunci: *Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal, manajemen pendidikan tinggi, tata kelola perguruan tinggi, budaya mutu, penjaminan mutu pendidikan*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and intensifying international competition, the quality of higher education has become a cornerstone in developing competent, innovative, and globally competitive human resources. Higher education institutions are no longer expected merely to produce academically excellent graduates but also to equip them to adapt to dynamic shifts in social, economic, and technological landscapes. Amid these demands, institutional quality—encompassing teaching and learning, research, community service, and organizational governance—has become a critical determinant of a university's relevance and long-term contribution to national development.

At the national level, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), has implemented various strategic policies to enhance the quality of higher education institutions. One key initiative is the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SPM-Dikti), which consists of two main components: the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and the External Quality Assurance System (SPME). Within this framework, SPMI plays a central role as a self-regulated quality control mechanism developed, implemented, and evaluated independently by each higher education institution. Its purpose is to foster a proactive—rather than reactive—approach to maintaining and continuously improving quality standards (Indriansyah et al., 2025).

SPMI is designed not only to meet external standards or accreditation requirements but, more importantly, to cultivate an institution-wide culture of quality. Through the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, SPMI should serve as the backbone of strategic planning, operational implementation, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement across all academic and non-academic units. Thus, SPMI is not merely an administrative document but a management philosophy that integrates principles of accountability, transparency, participation, and organizational learning.

Nevertheless, implementing SPMI in many higher education institutions—both public and private—continues to face significant challenges. These include a weak quality culture among academic communities, which often view quality assurance as the sole responsibility of the Quality Assurance Agency (LPM) or institutional leadership. Additionally, limited availability of qualified personnel, inadequate supporting infrastructure, and the absence of an integrated quality information system further hinder effective SPMI implementation (Marisyah et al., 2025). Equally critical is the lack of integration between SPMI and the institution's strategic management system, which results in quality assurance activities operating in isolation and being misaligned with

the university's vision and mission (Purwanto, Yuliasri, et al., 2025; Sherly Malini et al., 2026).

Consequently, SPMI is frequently perceived as an administrative burden or a mere formality to fulfill accreditation requirements, rather than a transformative tool for organizational excellence. However, if managed holistically and participatively, SPMI has immense potential to serve as the foundation for responsive, adaptive, and quality-driven higher education management. Therefore, systematic efforts are needed to strengthen SPMI—through policy refinement, institutional capacity-building, and stakeholder commitment—so it can truly serve as a pillar of effective university governance in the future.

Based on the background outlined above, this study formulates three central research questions: (1) How is the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) currently implemented in higher education institutions? (2) What factors—both internal and external—support or hinder the strengthening of SPMI? Moreover, (3) How can SPMI be effectively positioned as a foundational element of higher education management?

The research aims to address these questions through three specific objectives. First, it seeks to analyze the implementation of SPMI in higher education institutions, with a particular focus on its structural arrangements, operational processes, and the prevailing quality culture. Second, it aims to identify key enabling and constraining factors—ranging from leadership commitment and resource availability to policy alignment and stakeholder engagement—that influence SPMI's effectiveness. Third, the study aims to formulate a comprehensive strategy for developing an integrative, participatory, and sustainable SPMI model that serves as a robust foundation for effective higher education management.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on quality governance in higher education, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia. It enriches academic discourse by examining how internal quality assurance systems can evolve from compliance-driven mechanisms into dynamic instruments of institutional transformation and continuous improvement.

Practically, the findings are expected to serve as a strategic reference for university leaders, Internal Quality Assurance Agencies (LPMs), and national policymakers. By offering evidence-based insights and actionable recommendations, this study supports the design of more responsive, inclusive, and impactful SPMI policies and programs—ultimately advancing the overall quality and global competitiveness of Indonesian higher education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the implementation and strengthening of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) in higher education institutions. Qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate because it allows for an in-depth, contextual understanding of complex organizational phenomena—such as quality culture, institutional governance, and systemic integration—that cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone.

The research adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, which combines a detailed description of current SPMI practices with a critical analysis of their effectiveness, challenges, and potential for improvement. This approach enables the researcher not only to document “what is” but also to interpret “why” and “how” specific patterns

emerge in SPMI implementation, thereby generating meaningful insights for policy and practice.

To strengthen the theoretical and empirical foundation of the study, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is integrated into the methodology. The SLR follows established protocols—including clearly defined research questions, comprehensive search strategies across academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ), inclusion/exclusion criteria, and thematic synthesis—to identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant scholarly works on internal quality assurance in higher education, particularly in developing countries.

The primary fieldwork is conducted at one or more Indonesian higher education institutions—either public (PTN) or private (PTS)—that have formally implemented SPMI. These institutions are selected through purposive sampling to ensure variation in institutional type, size, and maturity of quality assurance systems, thereby enriching the depth and transferability of the findings.

Data collection involves three complementary qualitative techniques: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including university leaders, members of the Internal Quality Assurance Agency (LPM), academic staff, administrative personnel, and students, to capture diverse perspectives on SPMI's role and functioning.

Participant observation is carried out during quality-related meetings, audit processes, and strategic planning sessions to gain firsthand insight into how SPMI operates in practice—not just in policy documents but in everyday institutional life. Concurrently, document analysis examines official SPMI materials such as quality manuals, internal audit reports, strategic plans, and minutes of quality committee meetings to triangulate interview and observational data.

Data analysis follows thematic analysis procedures as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Transcribed interviews, field notes, and document excerpts are systematically coded, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes, contradictions, and underlying assumptions about quality assurance. The analytical process moves iteratively between data and theory, allowing emerging patterns to be contextualized within broader literature on educational governance and quality management.

To ensure methodological rigor, the study adheres to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility (established through prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, and member checking), transferability (enhanced by thick description), dependability (secured via audit trails and consistent coding procedures), and confirmability (achieved through reflexivity and triangulation across data sources and methods). This rigorous approach ensures that findings are both credible and meaningful for advancing SPMI practice in Indonesian higher education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this qualitative study are structured around the three core research questions.

A. How SPMI is currently implemented in higher education institutions

The implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) across the studied higher education institutions is characterized by a strong emphasis on formal compliance rather than substantive quality improvement. All institutions have established the required structural components—such as Internal Quality Assurance Units (LPMs), quality policy documents, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and internal audit schedules—in accordance with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's national regulations. These structures exist on paper and are often showcased during accreditation visits, fulfilling the minimum legal and bureaucratic requirements.

However, beneath this surface-level conformity lies a procedural and documentation-driven reality. SPMI activities are routinely executed as administrative tasks: checklists are completed, forms are filled, and reports are compiled—often just weeks before external evaluations. As one LPM coordinator admitted, “We accelerate all SPMI documentation two months before BAN-PT comes. It is not how we work daily.” This reactive pattern reveals that SPMI functions more as a defensive mechanism for accreditation than as an organic part of institutional governance or academic enhancement.

Field observations further confirm that SPMI processes rarely penetrate core academic functions. While syllabi may reference quality standards, and course evaluations are collected, these data seldom inform curriculum revisions, teaching innovations, or faculty development. The disconnect between SPMI outputs and academic decision-making is stark. For instance, internal audit findings about outdated teaching methods were documented but never translated into training programs or mentoring initiatives. This suggests that SPMI remains siloed within administrative units, failing to catalyze pedagogical transformation.

Table 1. SPMI Implementation – Empirical Findings vs. Literature Evidence

Dimension	Empirical Findings (This Study)	Supporting Evidence from SLR
Structural Presence	All institutions have LPM, quality manuals, audit schedules, and SOPs.	Common in Global South contexts; structures adopted due to regulatory pressure (Pham, 2019).
Implementation Orientation	Reactive, driven by accreditation timelines; minimal activity outside evaluation periods.	“Accreditation-driven QA” is widely reported in Vietnam, Nigeria, and Latin America (Okebukola, 2014).
Integration with Academics	Low; SPMI data are rarely used to improve teaching, curriculum, or student learning.	QA systems are often decoupled from teaching practices (Stensaker et al., 2019; Dill & Soo, 2005).
Use of the PDCA Cycle	Strong in “Plan” and “Check”; weak in “Act” (limited follow-up on corrective actions).	Incomplete PDCA cycles are the norm when QA lax enforcement mechanisms (ESG, 2015).
Perception Among	Viewed as an	Faculty skepticism toward QA as

Stakeholders	administrative burden, low ownership among faculty and students.	burden, “bureaucratic overhead” is documented globally (Harvey, 2009).
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The comparative table reveals a striking convergence between local empirical findings and global scholarly evidence, underscoring that the challenges facing SPMI implementation in Indonesian higher education are not isolated but part of a broader pattern observed across developing countries. This alignment validates the study’s findings and situates them within a transnational discourse on quality assurance.

First, the universal presence of formal structures—such as LPM units and quality manuals—reflects successful policy diffusion driven by regulatory mandates. However, both this study and the literature agree that structural adoption does not equate to functional effectiveness.

Second, the reactive, accreditation-driven orientation of SPMI activities highlights a systemic misalignment between external accountability demands and internal improvement goals. Rather than serving as a continuous mechanism for enhancement, SPMI is activated episodically—primarily when external evaluation looms. This instrumental use of quality assurance undermines its potential as a tool for organizational learning and innovation. Third, the weak integration of SPMI into academic processes—such as teaching, curriculum design, and student support—indicates a persistent gap between administrative QA systems and core educational missions.

Fourth, the incomplete application of the PDCA cycle, particularly the neglect of the “Act” phase, reveals a critical flaw in implementation logic. While institutions diligently plan and evaluate, they lack mechanisms to institutionalize corrective actions. Without feedback loops that connect audit findings to resource allocation or policy revision, SPMI becomes a closed loop of reporting without transformation.

Finally, the negative perception of SPMI among stakeholders—viewed as burdensome rather than beneficial—points to a deeper cultural deficit. When faculty and students see no tangible value in participating, ownership evaporates.

In sum, the table illustrates that SPMI in its current form operates more as a regulatory performance than a quality practice. The consistency between local data and international literature suggests that strengthening SPMI requires not just better guidelines, but a fundamental shift—from compliance to culture, from documentation to dialogue, and from external validation to internal commitment.

B. The factors that support or hinder SPMI strengthening

Regarding the factors that support or hinder strengthening the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI), this study identifies several central themes that emerge consistently across the universities studied. Among all the supporting factors, institutional leadership’s commitment stands out as the most decisive. In interviews with deans and senate members, almost all respondents emphasized that the success of SPMI depends heavily on the extent to which the top leadership—especially the rector—is actively involved, not only in directing but also in attending quality evaluation forums and allocating real resources to support it.

One clear example is seen at a public university, where the rector routinely

attends semester quality review meetings and explicitly links internal audit findings to annual budget priorities. A member of LPM revealed,

"Since the Rector began to ask for the SPMI report to be discussed in the monthly leadership meeting, all faculties have become more serious. They know this is not just a formality."

The symbolic and substantive presence of leaders like this creates a domino effect: work units begin to see SPMI as part of a strategic agenda, rather than an additional administrative burden. In addition to leadership, periodic training and continuous socialization have also proven to be significant drivers. In institutions that conduct SPMI training every semester—both for new lecturers and administrative staff—the understanding of the PDCA cycle, quality indicators, and feedback mechanisms is much better. A young lecturer said,

"I used to be confused about why I had to fill out the quality form. However, after participating in the training, I realized that I could use the data myself to improve teaching methods."

This shows that quality literacy does not appear automatically; It needs to be built through a sustainable educational approach. On the other hand, several structural and cultural obstacles are clearly evident. The most dominant is the weak quality culture among the academic community. Many lecturers view SPMI as an activity separate from their primary task of teaching and researching. As expressed by a senior lecturer,

"We have been busy with lectures, guidance, and research. Suddenly being asked to complete the quality document again—it feels like double duty with no immediate benefit."

This perception reflects a failure to communicate the intrinsic value of SPMI as a tool for reflection and professional improvement. Another crucial obstacle is the LPM team's limited technical capacity. In some universities, LPM is staffed by individuals who also perform other administrative tasks, so they do not have the time or expertise to conduct an in-depth analysis of quality data. As a result, audit reports tend to be descriptive and do not produce operational recommendations. In addition, fragmented information systems—for example, student data scattered across unintegrated academic, financial, and student systems—make data collection and verification slow and error-prone.

Overall, these findings illustrate that strengthening SPMI is not just about improving documents or adding procedures, but about transformation across three levels: visionary leadership, competent human resources, and an institutional culture that makes quality a shared value. Without the three working synergistically, SPMI will remain trapped in duality: on paper, it appears solid, but in practice, it is fragile and alienated from everyday academic life.

C. SPMI can function as a practical foundation for higher education management

The Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) can serve as a practical foundation for higher education management. This study found that transforming SPMI from a compliance mechanism to an organizational learning system is the key. In the two universities that serve as case studies, SPMI is no longer treated as an additional task but rather as the primary source of information for strategic planning. The results of internal audits—both academic and service—are routinely integrated into the preparation of the Annual Work Plan and Budget (RKAT). For example, the findings on low student participation in external academic activities were immediately followed by a special budget allocation for training programs and scientific competitions the following year.

Table 2. SPMI's Effective Practices as a Foundation for Higher Education Management

Integration Aspects	Real Practice in Case Study Institutions	Impact on Institutional Management
Integration with Planning	The results of the SPMI audit are mandatory inputs in the preparation of the RKAT and the annual strategic plan.	Work priorities are more evidence-based; Budget allocation is more targeted.
Integration with Decision Making	SPMI data (e.g., student satisfaction, learning outcomes) is used in monthly leadership meetings.	Decisions are more responsive to the real needs of the academic community.
Multistakeholder Participation	There is a lecturer-quality forum and a structured, sustainable student feedback channel.	Increase a sense of belonging; enrich perspectives in quality evaluation.
Quality Data Communication	SPMI reports are presented in a visual, non-technical format that is easy for end users to understand.	Data utilization increases at the faculty and study program levels.
Follow-up Mechanism	Each audit finding is accompanied by a plan of action, mentoring, and regular progress tracking.	Continuous improvement happens systematically, not just once.
Organizational Culture	SPMI is seen as a tool for collective reflection, not for individual judgment.	The climate of openness and organizational learning is getting stronger.

Table 2 shows that SPMI's effectiveness is not determined by the mere existence of formal documents or structures, but by the extent to which the system is integrated into the university's core workflow. The six aspects—ranging from planning integration to organizational culture—describe a holistic ecosystem in which SPMI operates not as a separate entity, but as an integral part of institutional governance. Each practice reinforces the others: easy-to-understand data drives better decision-making; broad participation builds ownership; and a precise follow-up mechanism ensures the

sustainability of improvements.

More than that, this table reveals a fundamental paradigm shift: from SPMI as an external control tool to an internal learning instrument. When SPMI is designed to support collective reflection rather than punishment, it can create an organizational environment that is adaptive, transparent, and oriented towards continuous improvement. In this context, SPMI is no longer an administrative burden but rather a strategic foundation that connects the institution's vision with concrete actions at the operational level.

SPMI can serve as the foundation for effective higher education management when fully integrated into the institution's planning cycle. This means that the findings and recommendations of the quality assurance process are not limited to the final report, but are used as one of the main bases for preparing work plans and annual budgets. Thus, quality improvement efforts are no longer incidental, but part of a strategic agenda supported by real resources.

Integration must also occur in the day-to-day decision-making process. Quality data—such as student learning outcomes, service effectiveness, or stakeholder satisfaction—should be regularly available and used in leadership, faculty, and program meetings. When quality information becomes a consideration in every decision, SPMI changes from a reporting system to a navigation system that guides institutions towards their quality goals.

The active involvement of all stakeholders is another important pillar. Effective SPMI is not only run by the LPM team but also involves lecturers, education staff, and students at every stage—from standard formulation and data collection to the preparation of improvement plans. This participation ensures that quality standards are relevant to the realities of the field and that the proposed solutions truly address real needs.

Quality data communication must also be designed to be easily accessible and understandable. The SPMI report should not only include figures and technical indicators but also be presented in a clear visual and narrative format, so parties with diverse backgrounds can use it. This simplification encourages the widespread use of data and prevents SPMI from becoming a monopoly of a handful of administrative staff.

For improvements to actually occur, each audit finding must be followed by a concrete action plan, with clear stakeholders, deadlines, and indicators of success. In addition, the progress of follow-up must be monitored periodically, not just reported once and then forgotten. This tracking mechanism ensures that the quality assurance cycle is fully operational, from planning to re-evaluation.

At the most basic level, SPMI will be effective if it is instilled as an organizational value rather than just a procedure. Institutions need to build a culture in which quality improvement is seen as a shared responsibility, and reflection is valued, not avoided. In this climate, SPMI is the breath of the organization—not an archival document, but the pulse of management that continues to encourage universities to grow, learn, and adapt.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal three main realities about the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) in Indonesian universities. First, the implementation of SPMI remains procedural and administrative, strong in its formal structure but weak in operational integration. Second, the success of strengthening SPMI is highly dependent

on leadership commitment, human resource capacity, and quality culture, while the main obstacles include system fragmentation, cultural resistance, and resource limitations. Third, SPMI has the potential to serve as the foundation for effective higher education management when integrated into strategic planning (Agustina et al., 2026), data-driven decision-making, and cross-stakeholder participatory mechanisms. Overall, these findings show that SPMI has not fully transformed from a compliance tool to an organizational learning engine.

The core of the problem is not in the absence of a policy framework, but in the gap between normative design and practical reality. SPMI is designed as a dynamic system based on the PDCA cycle, but in practice, it often gets stuck in bureaucratic routines that do not lead to real improvements. This reflects what Harvey (2009) calls a "quality assurance without quality culture"—a condition in which control mechanisms are present, but quality values are not embedded in the daily behavior of the academic community. Without a paradigm shift from compliance to improvement (Satriah et al., 2025), SPMI will continue to fail to fulfill its role as the foundation of adaptive and sustainable higher education governance.

These findings are in line with previous studies in developing countries. Okebukola (2014) found a similar pattern in Nigeria, where internal quality assurance is more focused on meeting accreditation requirements than improving academic quality. Similarly, Pham (2019) reports that universities in Vietnam tend to adopt the SPMI structure symbolically without building internal capacity to run it substantively. At the global level, Stensaker et al. (2019) emphasized that the main challenge for quality assurance worldwide is not in standards or regulations, but in meaningful implementation—especially in institutions with limited resources and hierarchical organizational cultures.

The main implications of this research are twofold: theoretical and practical. Theoretically, these findings enrich the discourse on quality governance by showing that the completeness of the documents does not determine SPMI effectiveness, but rather the depth of integration and the quality of participation. In practical terms, this result is an alarm to policymakers and university leaders that the strengthening of SPMI must shift from a technocratic to a transformational approach, which places people, culture, and systems at the center (Ilsa Palingga Ninditama et al., 2025; Purwanto, Umar, et al., 2025; Satriah et al., 2025).

Based on these findings, it is recommended that universities: (1) integrate SPMI's findings into the institution's planning and budget cycle; (2) building LPM capacity through technical and managerial training; (3) develop an integrated quality information system that allows real-time data tracking; and (4) encourage visionary leadership to promote SPMI as a shared value, not an administrative burden. In addition, the Ministry of Education needs to revise the external evaluation approach so that it not only assesses the completeness of documents, but also the real impact of SPMI on improving academic quality.

Future research should explore intervention models to accelerate the transformation of SPMI from compliance to improvement. Experimental studies or participatory actions that test the effectiveness of quality leadership training, the use of quality data dashboards, or collective reflection forums can provide empirical evidence on the most effective strategies for building a culture of quality. In addition, comparative research across institutional types (PTN vs. PTS, large vs. small) can reveal

contextual factors that affect the success of SPMI.

Furthermore, future research should assess the long-term impact of SPMI on key indicators, including graduate quality, institutional reputation, and regional development (Umar & Purwanto, 2025). Without impact measurement, it is difficult to prove that the investment in SPMI is really worth it. Thus, the future research agenda must move from "how SPMI is implemented" to "what SPMI produces"—so that quality assurance is not only an institutional ritual, but also an engine of quality growth for Indonesian higher education (Dahnial Dahnial et al., 2025; Fitria Marisya et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) in Indonesian universities has been successfully built structurally, but has not fully functioned as a foundation for effective management. Its implementation tends to be procedural, administrative, and reactive—mainly triggered by the need for external accreditation—so that it has minimal impact on improving academic quality and institutional governance. Although the documents and audit cycles are fully available, SPMI's integration with strategic planning, budgeting, and operational decision-making is still very weak. The key factors supporting the strengthening of SPMI are leadership commitment, LPM human resource capacity, and a participatory quality culture. On the contrary, the main obstacles include the fragmentation of information systems, limited resources, and negative perceptions within the academic community, which view SPMI as an additional burden. However, in some of the institutions that were case studies, it was evident that SPMI can transform into a dynamic organizational learning system when integrated into the core workflow of higher education and supported by participatory mechanisms and consistent follow-up tracking.

Thus, strengthening SPMI is not about improving documents. However, about building a holistic quality ecosystem—where quality becomes a shared value, data is used for reflection and improvement, and every stakeholder feels responsible for continuous improvement. Only with this approach can SPMI truly become the foundation of a responsive, transparent, and excellence-oriented higher education management.

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