

Research Article

Education Quality Assurance: The Controversy Between Quantity and Quality

Lu'at Happyana*, Muh. Imam Khaudli

Faculty of Tarbiyah And Teacher Training, Universitas KH Mukhtar Syafaat Banyuwangi, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, 68485

*Corresponding Author: luathappyana762@gmail.com | Phone Number: +628336408878

ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the challenges of ensuring educational quality with a focus on the balance between quantity and quality in secondary education at MA YPI Darul Huda Lubuk Harjo, Palembang. Using a qualitative approach with case study methods, this research explores limited resources, community demands for quantitative results, and weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and analysis of documents related to quality assurance policies and implementation. The research results show that limited funding and infrastructure affect the quality of educational services, while society's demands are often oriented towards measurable results, such as graduation rates and test scores, ignoring the holistic learning process. In addition, monitoring and evaluation processes that tend to be administrative without in-depth reflection weaken the effectiveness of quality assurance. This research recommends increasing resource support, public education, and developing a more comprehensive monitoring system to achieve a balance between quantity and quality in education quality assurance.

Keywords: Quality of Education; Controversy; Quantity; Quality

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a tension between increasing quantity (number of students) and quality of education (competencies, facilities and learning outcomes). Education policies often emphasize increasing access through larger numbers of students, but infrastructure, teacher quality and curricula do not always evolve in tandem with this increase. (Muiz et al., 2024) ; Dhia et al., 2024 ; Yanto et al., 2024). Data from the Ministry of Education shows an increase in student numbers, yet many schools, especially in remote areas, lack adequate facilities and teachers. UNESCO studies confirm that improved access is not always followed by improved quality (Puspita & Andriani, 2024). (Puspita & Andriani, 2021 ; Irawan et al., 2024 ; Stolz & Megerle, 2022). An emphasis on quantity without regard to quality can undermine the quality of education. A balance between access to education and quality of services is needed to ensure optimal outcomes. The relationship between quantity and quality in education is complex and often contentious. Although there is a positive correlation between education investment and the quantity and quality of education outcomes (Goczek et al., 2021) ; (Surur et al., 2020) ; (Kyriakides et al., 2020) However, the rapid expansion of access to higher education may raise concerns about declining educational standards. (Asari et al., 2023) ; Karina et al., 2021 ; (Yusuf et al., 2023).

Quality assurance mechanisms are essential for maintaining academic excellence, but their implementation can encounter barriers, especially in higher education environments. (Aliyah, 2021) ; Rahmah, n.d.). To address this challenge, institutions should adopt innovative practices that balance quantity and quality, such as improving curriculum design, enhancing teaching-learning processes, and strengthening research capabilities. (Hidayah, 2021) ; Suryaningrum et al., n.d.) . Effective quality assurance requires a multifaceted approach, taking into account factors such as student achievement, learning resources, and academic management. (Rizki et al., 2024 ; (Inayah, 2024) ; (Wahyudi Widodo & PdI, 2024). As education becomes increasingly internationalized, institutions must evolve to meet global standards while addressing local needs. (Wibowo, 2024) ; (NATASYA, 2024) ; (ARIFIN, 2022). Previous research proposed by (Bakti & Lubis, 2024 ; Muwafiqoh, 2023; Rahman & Nasihin, 2020) found that the implementation of education quality assurance policies in secondary schools still tends to focus on increasing the quantity of graduates rather than quality. Schools focus more on achieving the number of students who graduate rather than the results of evaluating student competencies. This is due to pressure from the government and the community to increase graduation rates. Nonetheless, some schools that integrate quality assurance as a whole have improved the quality of their graduates. And research conducted by (Rochaendi et al., 2022 ; Budiharso & Tarman, 2020 ; Komalasari et al., 2020) shows that increasing access through increasing class capacity

and the number of schools is not always directly proportional to improving quality. In many schools, the increasing number of students leads to limited teacher attention to individuals, which in turn has a negative impact on student learning outcomes. Nugroho suggested that education policy should emphasize improving the quality of teaching staff and supporting facilities.

Based on these research studies, there is a novelty in the context of education quality assurance, where the controversy between quantity and quality is increasingly complex. Based on previous research by Bakti & Lubis (2024), Rahman & Nasihin (2020), and Muwafiqoh (2023), the pressure to increase the quantity of graduates is still the main focus, but our research found that quality can still be achieved if there is a holistically integrated quality assurance policy. While research by Rochaendi et al. (2022), Budiharso & Tarman (2020), and Komalasari et al. (2020) highlighted the limited attention of teachers due to the increase in student numbers, this study highlights that innovative solutions such as the use of technology in learning can improve quality despite the increase in quantity, so education policies need to be more adaptive and technology-based to meet this challenge. This research offers novelty by revealing the integration strategy between quantity and quality in education policy, both at the national and global levels. The tension between improving access to education and the quality of learning outcomes is comprehensively analyzed, especially in remote areas and higher education settings. The study highlights the application of a multifaceted approach in quality assurance through innovative practices, such as adaptive curriculum design, improved teaching-learning processes and strengthened research capabilities. In addition, the study highlights the dynamic role of social and governmental pressures in the implementation of education policies, which often emphasize graduation rates over the development of student competencies.

In facing these challenges, this research provides strategic recommendations in the form of improving the quality of teaching staff and supporting facilities as a top priority in quality assurance. It also emphasizes the importance of evolving educational institutions to meet international standards while maintaining relevance to local needs. The findings are in line with educational quality assurance theory, which emphasizes the need for a multifaceted approach to ensure the sustainability of excellent educational outcomes. By providing a data-driven analysis, this research is not only academically relevant but also provides a practical contribution for policy makers to design a more balanced, innovative and sustainable education strategy.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method (Given et al., 2023) ; (Assyakurrohim et al., 2023) ; (Achjar et al., 2023). This approach was chosen to deeply understand the phenomenon of education quality assurance at MA YPI Darul Huda Lubuk Harjo, Palembang, especially in terms of the balance between quantity and quality. The selection of MA YPI Darul Huda, Lubuk Harjo, Palembang, as a case study is based on the unique characteristics of this institution that represents the challenges and opportunities of education in rural areas. As a madrasah that seeks to integrate Islamic values with the demands of modernization, this school faces the dynamics of a significant increase in student numbers, but is faced with limited infrastructure and teaching resources. In addition, its location in a rural area makes it relevant to examine the implementation of education policy in a local context. By examining MA YPI Darul Huda, this research can provide a comprehensive picture of the balance between quantity and quality in Islamic value-based education in a rural environment. Using a case study, this research examines how aspects of quality assurance are implemented and how controversies related to the focus on quantity and quality arise and are managed. The main informants in this study were the principal, teaching staff, and students. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling technique, where informants were selected based on direct involvement in the implementation or receiving the impact of the quality assurance policy at the institution. (Suriani & Jailani, 2023) ; (Lenaini, 2021) ; (Firmansyah, 2022).

Data collection techniques will be carried out through in-depth interviews conducted with managers, teaching staff, and students to gather information related to their experiences and views regarding quality assurance policies and implementation, as well as how the quantity and quality aspects are considered. (Makbul, 2021) ; (Mekarisce, 2020) ; (Susanto & Jailani, 2023). Participatory observation will also be conducted on operational activities of educational institutions, such as quality management meetings, learning processes, and educational evaluation activities. Document analysis is also used to obtain additional data from policy documents, annual reports and statistical data related to education quality, such as standards used, evaluation reports and data on learning outcomes.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis techniques (Rozali, 2022) ; (Kristanto & Padmi, 2020) ; (Sitasari, 2022). Data validity is ensured through data triangulation, which combines the results of interviews, observations, and documents to ensure consistency of findings (Bara, n.d.) ; (Utari et al., 2024) ; (Dumay, 2024) (Borim-de-Souza et al., 2020).

Member-checking was also applied by giving informants the opportunity to review and validate the results of data interpretation by the researcher. This method provides a comprehensive understanding of the controversy between quantity and quality in education quality assurance as well as the approaches educational institutions use to face this challenge.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Limited Resources and System Support

Limited resources and lack of system support are among the main challenges in education quality assurance efforts. Many educational institutions, especially in rural areas and small private institutions, face funding shortages that result in a lack of adequate facilities, such as proper school buildings, laboratories and libraries. In addition, access to education technology is still very limited, especially in remote areas that do not have a stable internet network. The shortage of qualified teaching staff exacerbates the situation, with many teachers lacking adequate professional qualifications and ongoing training programs not running optimally. The following are the results of the interview with the Principal

"To be honest, we face many limitations, especially in terms of funding. The budget we receive from the government is very limited, so it is difficult to make improvements to facilities such as laboratories and libraries. The school building is quite old and needs renovation, but there is no budget for it. We try our best with what we have, but this is clearly an obstacle in improving the quality of education." (KP)

Limited resources and system support have made education quality assurance efforts less effective. (Zuhairi et al., 2020); (Martiniuk et al., 2022); (Kolomitro et al., 2023). Students do not receive adequate facilities, teachers do not have access to relevant training and education institutions do not have sufficient resources or policy support to implement quality improvement programs. This imbalance between expectations of education quality and conditions on the ground leads to inequities in education quality, especially between schools in urban and rural areas. (Isma et al., 2023) ; (Basuki, 2021) ; (Nasution, 2022). Therefore, more comprehensive efforts are needed, both in terms of funding, infrastructure, teacher professional development, and policies that focus more on holistic and sustainable quality improvement.

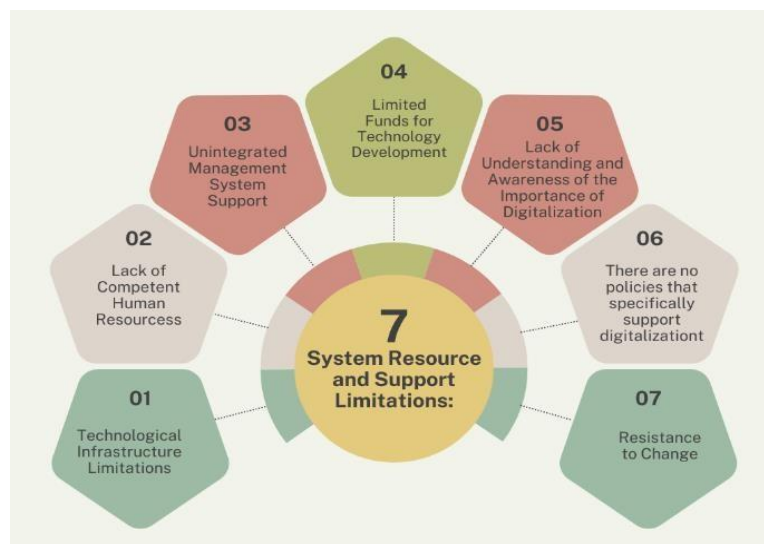


Figure 1. Limited Resources and System Support

Limited resources and system support in education quality assurance reveal the challenges faced by educational institutions, especially in rural areas and small private schools. Limited funding is a root cause of the problem that has a direct impact on the availability and quality of educational facilities. Schools in these areas often lack basic facilities, such as proper school buildings, laboratories and adequate libraries. (Rahayu, 2023) ; (Musfah, 2021) ; (Mawar et al., n.d.). This condition not only hampers comfort in the learning process but also reduces the quality of education that can be provided to students. On the other hand, educational technology, which is increasingly important in the modern learning process, is also difficult to access for many schools in remote areas. Uneven internet infrastructure and the lack of a stable network make the implementation of educational technology a challenge. (Munir & Su'ada, 2024) ; (Farid et al., 2024) ; (Firdaus & Ritonga, 2024). This condition limits students' access to more extensive and interactive educational resources, such as online learning materials, digital libraries, and learning applications.

In addition to facilities and technology, the availability of qualified teaching staff is also a serious challenge. Many teachers who teach in rural areas do not have adequate professional qualifications (Idin et al., 2024). (Idin et al., 2024) ; (Susianita & Riani, 2024); (Hafizin et al., 2024). Continuous training programs that should play a role in improving teacher competence are also not running optimally, so the quality of teaching is limited. Low teacher competence has a direct impact on the quality of education received by students, considering that teachers play a spearhead role in the education process. (Fitriasari et al., 2024); (Ritonga et al., 2022); (Damayanti, 2023). Support from the system, both from the government and related organizations, is still limited in overcoming these limitations. Aid programs to support the improvement of facilities and the provision of training for teachers are inadequate to address these shortcomings. This suggests that education quality assurance efforts cannot be fully achieved if these fundamental issues are not addressed. Greater support from the government and education organizations is needed so that educational institutions, especially in remote areas, can develop their potential and meet the expected quality standards. (Faizi, 2024) ; (Sahira, 2023) ; (Fadil et al., 2023) ; (Solekha et al., 2024).

3.2 Quantity-Oriented Demands of Society

The demands of a more quantity-oriented society in education often emphasize the achievement of measurable results, such as high test scores, the number of graduates, and certificates, rather than the quality of deep learning. (Sobari, 2024) ; (SYARIF, 2024); (Erlangga, 2024). Many parents and communities still view educational success from these numbers, ignoring the importance of developing students' critical skills, creativity and problem-solving abilities. As a result, educational institutions feel pressured to focus on measurable outcomes, such as achieving test scores and graduation, so that the learning process focuses more on test preparation and not on quality and holistic learning.

The following are the results of the interview with the Principal

"Today, we see a significant change in people's expectations. Many prioritize quantity, such as the number of students graduating or graduating in a short time, over the quality of education. They often ask how many of our graduates are immediately employed or continue their education to the next level, and what the average score of our students is, without much consideration of the quality aspect." (KP)

The results of these interviews indicate a shift in society's mindset that requires educational institutions to find a balance between meeting quantitative demands and maintaining a holistic quality of education. This pressure to adjust to societal expectations also points to the importance of educating people to understand the importance of education quality beyond numbers and statistics. The following table shows the demands of a more quantity-oriented society in education.

Aspects	Description
Orientation to Academic Grades and Achievement	Society emphasizes test scores and academic achievement as measures of educational success, rather than deep and meaningful learning.
Increased number of graduates	School success is often measured by the number of students who graduate and are accepted into higher education, so educational institutions focus on quantitative results rather than developing the quality of learning.
Neglect of Learning Quality Aspects	The focus on quantitative results causes learning to focus on the material tested and neglects character education, creativity and important life skills.
Pressures from the National Examination System	The national exam or standardized test system forces schools to prioritize exam preparation to improve graduation results, reducing the focus on deep mastery of the material.
Psychological Impact on Students	The quantity orientation creates high pressure for students to achieve good grades, which results in less motivation to learn deeply or explore personal interests.

The table above reveals that society's orientation towards quantity has shifted the focus of education from holistic learning quality to quantitatively measurable outcomes. This risks producing graduates who have high grades, but are less prepared to face real-world challenges that require creative, social and adaptive skills. There needs to be a paradigm shift in education that emphasizes a balance between quantity and quality, so that education not only produces academically

competent graduates, but also individuals who are ready to contribute meaningfully to social and professional life. (Siswanto et al., 2024) ; (Masduki Ahmad, 2022) ; (Marzuki & Sakdiyah, 2023). Society now prioritizes graduation rates and high grades over the quality of education (Situmeang et al., 2021) ; (Lestari, 2024) ; (Yaqin et al., 2024). This puts pressure on educational institutions to adjust curricula and teaching methods to show measurable results, often at the expense of developing students' character and critical thinking skills.

The culture of competition between educational institutions has intensified, and many institutions focus on academic outcomes that look "good" on paper. Parents also prefer institutions based on graduation rates rather than the actual quality of learning. (Anwar et al., 2024); (Phafiandita et al., 2022); (Nurlaela, 2022). It is important for educational institutions to find a balance between meeting the demands of society and maintaining the quality of education. (Kusumaningrum et al., 2024); (Wachid et al., 2024); (Utomo & Rizqa, 2024). Institutions should strive to educate the public about the importance of comprehensive and holistic learning, which includes character development, social skills, and critical thinking. Thus, educational institutions will not only produce graduates with good numbers, but also individuals who are ready to face the challenges of life outside the academic world.

3.3 Lack of Effective Monitoring And Evaluation

The lack of effective monitoring and evaluation in education quality assurance is a major challenge in improving the quality of education. (Ma'arif et al., 2024); (Kusumawati, 2023); (Warta et al., 2024). The monitoring process is often carried out only as an administrative formality without exploring the real conditions in the field. (Mustari, 2022); (Hildawati et al., 2024) ; (Suyitno, 2023). The resulting evaluations tend to be general and do not provide constructive feedback that can be used as a basis for improving the quality of learning. The lack of stakeholder involvement, such as teachers, students and parents, also makes the evaluation process not fully reflect the actual needs and conditions in educational institutions. (Wachid et al., 2024); (Timpal, 2024); (Amriyadi et al., 2023). The following are the results of the interview with the Principal

"Monitoring and evaluation is done, but to be honest, it's often just a formality. We are only asked to fill in reports and submit certain data. I feel that the results do not give a real picture of the condition of the classroom or the quality of learning in the school. The focus is more on numbers, such as test scores and graduation rates, but less on other important aspects, such as students' skill development".

The interviews indicate that the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation not only hampers improvements in education quality but also creates dissatisfaction among all parties involved. (Wachid et al., 2024); (Ramos et al., 2021); (Shobri, 2024). A more holistic and collaborative approach to monitoring and evaluation is needed, where all stakeholders can play an active role in identifying needs, providing constructive feedback and developing relevant corrective measures to improve the overall quality of education. (Sentanu et al., 2024); (Arifin & Mu'id, 2024); (Sholeh et al., 2023).



Figure 2. Lack of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation

The absence of clear evaluation standards, low frequency of monitoring and lack of training for educators hinder consistent measurement of educational progress. (Baily, 2021) ; (Kineber et al., 2023) ; (Hamdanah et al., 2024). Evaluation data are often underutilized, while resource limitations and lack of transparency reduce accountability. In addition,

monitoring tends to focus only on academic aspects, neglecting the development of character and skills that are essential to the quality of graduates. Without clear evaluation standards and consistent monitoring frequency, educational institutions have difficulty monitoring student development comprehensively. (Sastraatmadja et al., 2024); (Elahi & Bilal, 2024); (Sousa et al., 2021). Lack of evaluation training for educators and limited resources weaken the effectiveness of monitoring, while underutilized evaluation data hinder continuous improvement. In addition, the focus of evaluation only on academic aspects, as well as the lack of transparency, reduces the accountability and effectiveness of the institution in creating quality graduates. (Armadan, 2023); (Muiz et al., 2024); (Suryadi et al., 2024). For this reason, clear evaluation standards, specialized training for educators, and greater transparency are needed for monitoring to function optimally as a tool for improving education quality. (Anggal et al., 2020); (Silviani, n.d.); (Hasanah, n.d.).

4. CONCLUSION

There are a number of challenges in education quality assurance related to limited resources, the community's orientation towards quantity and ineffective monitoring and evaluation. Limited infrastructure and funding hamper the ability of educational institutions, especially in remote areas and pesantren, to provide adequate facilities and training for teachers and students. Societal pressure for measurable results encourages schools to prioritize the quantity of graduates over the overall quality of learning. In addition, the monitoring and evaluation process is often merely administrative, without regard to the actual quality of learning and without involving all stakeholders. Therefore, a holistic approach involving adequate resource support, public education on the importance of education quality, and transparent and collaborative evaluation is needed so that educational institutions can produce graduates who are not only academically competent but also ready to face real challenges in society.

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