Private Higher Education Quality Development Strategy in Improving Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is an integral part of the national education system that plays a vital role in educating the nation and encouraging the advancement of science and technology. In carrying out its role, higher education continues to prioritize humanistic values and the sustainable empowerment of Indonesian society. Higher education also serves to increase the nation's competitiveness in facing global challenges in various fields. The effective implementation of quality assurance will have a positive impact, both directly and indirectly, on the higher education institution. One of the private universities in Gresik that has consistently improved its quality and competitiveness is Muhammadiyah University of Gresik. This research uses a qualitative case study approach. The results show that the consistent alignment of internal (SPMI) and external (SPME) quality has made a real contribution to the university and its study programs. This is evidenced by external recognition from the university in the form of achieving the number 1 ranking for the best university in Gresik and several study programs being accredited as "Excellent" in 2025.

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Introduction

Higher education is a vital part of the national education system and plays a significant role in improving the nation's life and driving technological and scientific progress. Higher education continues to uphold the values of humanism and empowerment of the Indonesian people in carrying out its role [1]. Furthermore, higher education enhances the nation's competitiveness in facing global challenges in various fields [2]. Effective quality assurance will benefit higher education institutions [3];[1]. Effective quality assurance has direct impacts, including clear governance, efficient educational processes, enhanced status, and improved rankings. However, indirect impacts include increased motivation and ensuring effective organizational collaboration.

One effective way to ensure quality is to improve the quality of higher education institutions. To support academic targets, internal quality assurance serves multiple purposes [4]. External quality assurance, on the other hand, is carried out by providing rankings or accreditation to the institutions being evaluated. The purpose of external quality assurance is to demonstrate an institution's quality and provide information to the public and stakeholders [5].

To qualify for accreditation as a quality indicator, every higher education institution must implement an Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) [6]. IQAS is an essential part of the higher education institution's Quality Assurance System (QAS) and is implemented independently by the institution to monitor and improve quality. Conversely, IQAS is an evaluation process conducted by an independent institution to assess the suitability and quality of a study program or institution. The resulting accreditation rating is the result [7]. To ensure educational quality, higher education institution quality assurance institutions must ensure that internal quality audits are conducted with the aim of ensuring educational quality [8]. Most higher education institutions prioritize external quality audits or accreditation over internal audits [9]. However, the internal quality audit process actually prepares institutions for external quality audits, as the two are inextricably linked. The accreditation process or external quality audit can also be successful by improving internal quality through the SPME implemented by the institution's quality assurance agency [10].

Although various studies have examined the importance of internal and external quality assurance systems in improving the quality of higher education institutions, several research gaps remain. First, most studies focus on the relationship between SPME and accreditation achievement, while studies on the effectiveness of SPMI implementation at the operational level—particularly in the internal quality audit process—remain limited [11]. Second, while previous research has focused on the long-term benefits of quality assurance, few have examined the real challenges faced by quality assurance agencies in ensuring the consistent and sustainable implementation of internal quality audits [12].

Third, there is still limited research examining the gap in priorities between internal and external audits and how this impacts an institution's readiness for accreditation [13]. Therefore, research is needed that specifically explores how internal quality audits are implemented and the extent to which internal audits contribute to the success of external quality audits and competitiveness. This research aims to identify methods to ensure the quality of higher education institutions internally and externally in an effort to increase competitiveness and quality.

Method

To study the implementation of internal quality audits and their impact on external accreditation readiness, this study employed a qualitative approach with a case study. The research indicators are described as follows:

Table 1. Qualitative Research Indicators

No.	Focus	Element	Indicator
1.	Strategic Planning for Quality Development	How the university designs its quality strategy	a. Institutional vision, mission, and objectives related to quality and competitiveness b. Involvement of leadership and the academic community in planning c. Analysis of needs and challenges (internal-external) d. Strategic plan documents (Renstra, RIP, Quality Plan)

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No.			
			e. Determination of academic and non-academic quality targets
2.	Implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI)	Sustainable quality implementation	a. Academic community understanding of SPMI b. Implementation of the PPEPP cycle (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, Improvement) c. Role of the Quality Assurance Institution (LPM) d. Follow-up on quality evaluation results e. Quality culture on campus
3.	Human Resource Development	Quality of Lecturers and Education Staff	a. Strategies for Improving Lecturer Qualifications and Competencies b. Institutional Support for Further Study and Certification c. Training and Professional Development Programs d. Lecturer and Education Staff Performance Assessment System e. Human Resource Motivation and Commitment to Institutional Quality
4.	Learning and Curriculum Quality	the quality of the academic process	a. Relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the workplace b. Implementation of the OBE/MBKM-based curriculum c. Innovation in learning methods d. Utilization of technology in learning e. Evaluation and improvement of the learning process
5.	Facilities, Infrastructure, and Supporting Technology	Facility support for quality	a. Availability and suitability of academic facilities b. Utilization of academic information systems c. Support for digital technology and e-learning d. Campus facility development policies e. User perceptions of available facilities
6.	Institutional Cooperation and Networking	Strengthening External Competitiveness.	a. National and international cooperation development strategies b. Involvement of industry and professional partners c. Implementation of collaboration outcomes within the Tri Dharma (Three Pillars of Excellence) d. Impact of collaboration on institutional reputation

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			e. Sustainability and evaluation of collaboration
7.	Institutional Image and Higher Education Competitiveness:	the results of quality development strategies	a. Stakeholder perceptions (students, alumni, graduate users) b. Institutional promotion and branding strategies c. Competitive advantage compared to other private universities d. Attractiveness to prospective students e. Public trust in the institution

Source: Author's Processing (2025)

Qualitative research, based on postpositivism because the research objective is not only to measure phenomena objectively, but to deeply understand the complex social reality related to the quality development strategies of private higher education institutions in increasing competitiveness. The postpositivism paradigm views reality as objective but cannot be fully understood, because it is influenced by the context, values, and perspectives of the subjects involved. Therefore, understanding the quality development strategies of private higher education institutions requires an interpretive approach that allows researchers to capture the meaning, processes, and dynamics that occur within the institution. According to [14] the researcher serves as the primary instrument. Data collection techniques used triangulation (combined), data analysis was conducted inductively or qualitatively, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning (which can only be communicated through words or language) rather than generalizations [15].

This study utilized a Muhammadiyah University of Gresik as the location. Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary and secondary data were used in this study. Primary data were collected through observations and interviews with University Leaders (Rector/Vice Rector); Chair/Members of LPM; Heads of Study Programs; Lecturers; Students; and Industrial Partners/Users of Graduates. The SPMI manual, audit instruments, audit reports, and accreditation documents were used to obtain secondary data. Data analysis used the [16] model, which consists of presentation, drawing conclusions, and data reduction. However, triangulation techniques, sources, and member checks were used to test the validity of the data [16].

Results and Discussion

Profile Muhammadiyah University of Gresik

Muhammadiyah University of Gresik was founded to enhance Muhammadiyah's charitable efforts in higher education, as at that time there were no universities in Gresik Regency. Based on the Decree of the Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership of Gresik Regency, the Education, Teaching, and Culture Council Number E.1/017-V/1980, dated May 25, 1980, Muhammadiyah University of Gresik was established, with the inauguration being conducted by the Regent of Gresik Regency, Colonel Wasiadji, SH, who also served as the patron.

In 1983, Muhammadiyah University of Gresik applied for registration status with the Kopertis Region VI (now Region VII). Following the direction of Kopertis Region VI and a mutual agreement between the leadership of IKIP Muhammadiyah Surabaya, the Surabaya Institute of Technology, and Muhammadiyah University of Gresik, the three universities were merged based on the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 0141/0/1984 dated March 9, 1984, to become Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya. In Gresik, it was renamed Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya Gresik Campus.

Table 2. Faculties and Study Programs Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya, Gresik Campus, 1984

No.	Faculty	Study Program
1	Economics	a. Management
		b. Economics and Development Studies
2	Teacher Training and Education	a. Mathematics Education
		b. Educational Technology Curriculum

Source: https://umg.ac.id/list_profil (2025)

Taking into account several considerations and the development of the Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya Gresik Campus, in 1987/1988, two faculties were opened: the Faculty of Agriculture and the Faculty of Fisheries. These two faculties were submitted for registered status as the Muhammadiyah Agricultural College and the Muhammadiyah Fisheries College in Gresik through the Kopertis Region VII Surabaya. Based on Decrees of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 0763/0/1989 and Number 0841/0/1989, both colleges received registered status. To further strengthen the management of the faculties, the two colleges were integrated into Muhammadiyah University of Gresik. Based on Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 0498/0/1990 dated August 8, 1990, the integration of the two colleges became Muhammadiyah University of Gresik.

The undergraduate faculties and study programs that received registered status based on Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Number 0499/0/1990 dated August 8, 1990, are (Table 3):

Table 3. Faculties and Study Programs at Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya, Gresik Campus, 1990

No	Faculty	Study Program
1	Agriculture	a. Agricultural Cultivation b. Agricultural Product Technology
2	Fisheries	a. Fisheries Cultivation b. Fisheries Product Technology
3	Economics	c. Management d. Accounting
4	Teacher Training and Education	e. Accounting Education f. Mathematics Education

Source: https://umg.ac.id/list_profil (2025)

With the registered status of these study programs, in 1990, Muhammadiyah University of Gresik separated from Muhammadiyah University of Surabaya. In 1993, Muhammadiyah University of Gresik built a new campus located in the Gresik Kota Baru (GKB) housing complex, specifically in Randu Agung Village, Kebomas District, Gresik Regency. In the 2002/2003 academic year, the digital library and computer laboratory moved into the new building, as did the student activity center, Basic Science laboratory, and Accounting laboratory. Various learning facilities, infrastructure, and equipment are continuously being improved to support the teaching and learning process. In the 2003/2004 academic year, a new three-story building with approximately 15 lecture rooms was constructed. In the 2004/2005 academic year, a three-story Faculty of Engineering building was completed, complete with an auditorium on the third floor. In the 2006/2007 academic year, a three-story Student Facilities Building was completed, specifically designed for the offices of student organizations (BPM), BEM, HMJ, and activity units such as KSR, Mapala Biru, Arts, Sports, and IMM.

In the 2007/2008 academic year, an integrated laboratory building was completed, including Industrial Engineering and Electrical Engineering laboratories, Basic Engineering laboratories (Chemistry, Biology, Physics), the Center for the Study of Religion and Industrial Society, and the Laboratory. The Agronomy and Greenhouse sectors completed the construction of the Faculty of Agriculture building in the 2014/2015 academic year, which includes faculty offices, lecture halls, and laboratories. In 2015/2016, a new nine-story building was built, which was inaugurated by the Deputy Governor of East Java, Saifullah Yusuf, on Friday, April 1, 2016. So that by 2025, the number of faculties and study programs will have been developed as follows (Table 4):

Table 4. Faculties and Study Programs at Muhammadiyah University of Gresik, 2025

No	Faculty	Study Program
1	Agriculture	a. Bachelor's Degree in Agribusiness b. Bachelor's Degree in Agrotechnology

		c. Bachelor's Degree in Aquaculture
		d. Bachelor's Degree in Food Technology
2	Economics and Business	a. Bachelor's Degree in Management
		b. Bachelor's Degree in Accounting
		c. Bachelor's Degree in Entrepreneurship
3	Teaching and Education	a. Bachelor's Degree in English Language Education
		b. Bachelor's Degree in Elementary School Teacher Education
		c. Bachelor's Degree in Teacher Professional Education
		d. Bachelor's Degree in Mathematics Education
4	Engineering	a. Bachelor's Degree in Chemical Engineering
		b. Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering
		c. Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Engineering
		d. Bachelor's Degree in Marine Engineering
		e. Bachelor's Degree in Informatics Engineering
		f. Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering
		g. Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering
		h. Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems
5	Islamic Religious	a. Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Religious Education
		b. Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Islamic Education
6	Psychology	Bachelor's Degree in Psychology
7	Law	Bachelor's Degree in Law
8	Health	a. Bachelor's Degree in Midwifery
		b. Midwifery Profession

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	c.	Bachelor's Degree in Nursing
	d.	Nursing Profession
	e.	Bachelor's Degree in Nutrition
	f.	Bachelor's Degree in Public Health
	g.	Diploma 3 in Pharmacy
	h.	Diploma 4 in Medical Laboratory Technology
9 Postgraduate	a.	Master's Degree in Management
	b.	Master's Degree in English Language Education

Source: Author's Process (2025)

Table 5. Basic Values, Culture and Basic Beliefs of Muhammadiyah University of Gresik

Core Values	Culture	Basic Beliefs
1. Believing in God and all His teachings. 2. Responsive and proactive in responding to all changes. 3. Never ceasing to strive for perfection. 4. Believing in one's own strengths while respecting the strengths of others. 5. Unyielding in serving humanity.	1. Appearance: modern, beautiful, clean, bright, comfortable, and fragrant 2. Collective behavior: responsive, proactive, quick, decision-making (aglity), united, transformative, with a clear and smooth work flow, and respect for new theories and time. 3. Individual behavior: full of dreams and courage.	1. Togetherness: UMG will not progress unless the entire academic community is able to work together solidly and dynamically internally, and then collaborate with all parties. 2. Hard Work, Smart Work, and Satisfaction for All Parties: With smart work and hard work, every progress can be achieved. Only in this way can personal and shared satisfaction be achieved. Satisfaction is the key to UMG's progress. 3. Cleanliness:

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Pureness of spirit (sincerity) and body, manifested in the physical atmosphere of the campus, and the academic community in its relationships with all parties, is the main pillar of UMG's progress.

Source: https://umg.ac.id/list_profil (2025)

Quality Assurance

The quality of an educational institution is the primary motivation for all students throughout the educational process. Consequently, educational institutions that lack "quality" will inevitably lose followers and ultimately be abandoned by society. Quality is a "standard" that indicates the excellence of something [17]. A university is considered quality when it is able to meet the needs of society; it can produce individuals capable of making positive contributions to social development (social needs), it can produce individuals needed by the world of work, and especially, it can produce productive individuals who can create jobs [18].

Therefore, improving the quality of higher education is not an easy task; it requires careful planning, commitment, and a strong desire translated into a vision, mission, and objectives of the educational process. Universities are considered quality when they can produce graduates who meet the needs of the times, are accepted in the world of work, and can create jobs. The quality of a university can be seen from the formulation of its vision and mission, which are then implemented in the educational process. The concept of quality changed its meaning to quality assurance in the 1980s because it fit its objectives [19]. At the University of Muhammadiyah Gresik, strategic planning for quality improvement is reflected in the following vision, mission, goals, and targets:

Vision the University of Muhammadiyah Gresik

"By 2030, to become a leading, independent university imbued with Islamic entrepreneurial values."

Table 6. Mission, Goals and Targets the University of Muhammadiyah Gresik

Mission	Goals	Targets
1. To provide quality, measurable education, research, and community service through realistic education; 2. To establish an independent university with good university governance. 3. To implement an Islamic entrepreneurship learning process to produce graduates who are ready to live in the global world.	1. To become a leading university with an Islamic identity, developing individuals with noble character, professionalism, and a global perspective. 2. To become a university that is independent in resource management and good university governance. 3. To become an Islamic university with independent and superior entrepreneurship.	1. Optimal implementation of the KKNI curriculum in all study programs by internalizing Islamic values, entrepreneurship, and strengthening soft skills. 2. Fulfillment of core infrastructure standards to optimize academic services to support the concept of "The Realistic Education." 3. Fulfillment of supporting infrastructure standards to optimize academic services. 4. Establishment of a university governance system that is credible, accountable, and responsible, and meets the aspect of fairness in serving all parties. 5. Improving the sustainability of higher education services to the community (Opening of a Postgraduate Program, two undergraduate study programs, and a medical faculty). 6. Fulfillment of human resource development service standards and improvement of internal stakeholder development (remuneration of lecturers and staff) that is proportional and fair, in accordance with the university's financial capacity and general standards (at least in accordance with government regulations).

7. Developing an atmosphere of academic and non-academic activities across fields/disciplines and within disciplines, thereby encouraging the growth of lecturer and student performance.

8. The growing use of information technology in the learning process among the academic community.

9. The growing quality and quantity of research and community service in the form of intellectual property rights (IPR), patents, copyrights, books, journals, articles, etc., which meet the minimum ratio of lecturers to output standards.

10. The growing quality and quantity of mutually beneficial collaborations, both domestically and internationally, especially in the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi activities.

11. The realization of funding sources through the development of business units under the management of faculties and universities.

Source: https://umg.ac.id//list_visi (2025)

Quality assurance is defined as a continuous and systematic effort to maintain and improve quality [20] ;[21]. Conversely, as stated by [30] quality assurance is the plans, actions, and procedures used to ensure the quality of education can be maintained and improved. The higher education accreditation process is also associated with quality assurance [22] ; [23]. Expressed a different opinion, stating that quality assurance is also the result of an evaluation that is sometimes unrelated to the accreditation function [24]. Quality in higher education is a relative, subjective, and multidimensional concept, and is not a measure of outcomes but of the impact on the institution [25]

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Research on a universal definition of quality has not yet reached a consensus. This heterogeneous view shows that quality is assessed from the perspective of the person who sees it. According to UMultirank (2021) there are many explanations about quality, quality assurance, and quality assessment, and sometimes there are differences of opinion and confusion due to different interpretations of the same concept. According to [26] it is stated that creating relevant and strong quality assurance is to ensure that quality assurance provisions do not only concern academic aspects but also the value and potential impact of work and career outcomes. Higher education standards as follows [27]: "*outputs, input or process characteristic of formal or non formal education. Typical output measures include student achievment (or such proxies as completion rates and various form of certifcation) literacy and pratical skills*".

Internal quality assurance is the quality assurance carried out by higher education institutions using methods determined by the implementing institution. The parameters and methods for measuring results are determined by the institution in accordance with its vision and mission. By implementing internal quality assurance, higher education institutions should conduct internal evaluations. Internal evaluations are conducted to ensure continuous quality improvement. The quality of a higher education institution is defined as the overall state and characteristics of inputs, processes, products, or services measured using standards to determine and reflect the institution's quality [27]

The university quality assurance system consists of two parts: internal and external quality assurance. Internal quality assurance is a self-evaluation conducted by study programs or academic institutions. Its purpose is to improve performance and provide internal quality assurance to all parties involved in the university, namely leaders, lecturers, researchers, staff, and students. According to the integrated quality assurance system, all activities, both academic and non-academic, must receive quality assurance [28]

Internal Quality Implementation

The steps for implementing SPMI, based on the SPMI Implementation Guidelines for Higher Education, established by the Directorate General of Education, are as follows [27] (Table 7):

Table 7. SPMI Implementation Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions

No	SPMI Implementation Guidelines for Higher Education	Description
1	Standard Determination Stage	This stage involves the creation, consideration, and final approval or establishment of standards by the relevant authorities within the higher education institution. This is carried out by the university leadership and the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM or UPM). The university's vision, mission, and objectives determine the standards developed by this team. At this stage, stakeholders such as deans, heads of study programs, and lecturers typically provide feedback.
2	Standard Implementation Stage	This stage involves all parties responsible for implementing the standards. This is carried out by all university units, including faculties, study programs, administration, and teaching and learning staff. They are responsible for ensuring that established regulations are adhered to in their daily activities.
3	Standard Compliance Evaluation Stage	This stage involves evaluating whether the implementation of the standard complies with established standards and how it is being met. This is carried out by the Directorate of Quality Assurance (DPM) and a special evaluation team selected by the university leadership. In this evaluation, compliance with standards and procedures is monitored.
4	Standard Implementation Control Stage	This stage is where the person responsible for implementing the standard makes corrections if

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		there are errors in the content or implementation of the standard, maintains proper implementation, and improves its quality, where possible. Deviations discovered during the evaluation are corrected by the UPM and unit leaders. At this stage, recommendations for quality maintenance and improvement are also developed.
5	Standard Improvement Stage	This stage is where the content of the standard must be evaluated and gradually improved. The university leadership and LPM/UPM collaborate with relevant parties to review the current standard. To improve quality, this process involves discussion and research based on periodic evaluations.

Source: Minister of Research, Technology and Higher Education Regulation No. 44 (2025)

The standards of educational facilities and infrastructure will be consistently monitored and evaluated through the SPMI to ensure they are adequate, high-quality, easy to use, and accessible. The implementation, control, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of teaching and learning activities within study programs must be regularly monitored and evaluated through the SPMI to improve the learning process and create a positive academic and cultural environment. Learning financing standards must be well-planned, including higher education investment costs and operational costs, to support academic activities at the university. The primary objective of the Revenue and Expenditure Budget Plan (RAPB) is to develop higher education institutions through the implementation of the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (Three Pillars of Higher Education). The SPMI must ensure that the RAPB complies with Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 49 of 2014.

The Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SPM PT) is a higher education standard consisting of two systems. The Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) has a cycle of establishing educational standards, implementing educational standards, evaluating (implementing) educational standards, controlling (implementing) educational standards,

and improving (implementing) educational standards, known as PPEPP. The External Quality Assurance System (SPME) has a cycle of data and information evaluation, determining accreditation status and accreditation ranking, and monitoring and evaluating accreditation status and accreditation ranking, known as EPP.

Improving Higher Education Standards is part of the PPEPP (Planning for Continuous Quality Improvement), which is the final "P." Each Higher Education standard will result in kaizen, or continuous quality improvement (CQI), within the Higher Education standards, which will foster a culture of quality in terms of mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors based on the Higher Education standards

SPMI is a systematic activity for quality assurance in higher education that can be carried out independently or autonomously by each university to control and improve the implementation of higher education in a planned and sustainable manner. Therefore, each university can develop SPMI with a vision, mission, history, core values that inspire the university's establishment, number of study programs, human resources, facilities and infrastructure, and culture.

The implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) at Muhammadiyah University of Gresik can be seen in the following: 1) Implementation of the PPEPP cycle (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, Improvement). According to an interview with the Director of the Quality Assurance Directorate, he stated: "*Internal quality assurance in the Study Program is carried out by the Head of the Internal Quality Assurance Center as a representative of the Quality Assurance Directorate. He ensures the implementation of PPEPP and collaborates with the Quality Control Group (GKM) representing each faculty. Therefore, the study program management unit in each faculty is assisted by the Quality Control Group. Its activities include: monitoring and evaluation of learning and internal quality audits, which are routinely conducted every semester for each study program*". 2) The Role of the Directorate of Quality Assurance (DPM) : In practice, the UMG Directorate of Quality Assurance serves as the primary driver in the planning, implementation, evaluation, and development of the higher education quality system within the university, and ensures that all academic and non-academic aspects

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are carried out in a standardized, transparent, and sustainable manner. 3) Follow-up on Quality Evaluation Results : Follow-up on quality evaluation results by the Directorate of Quality Assurance (DPM) of the University of Muhammadiyah Gresik (UMG) is generally carried out as part of the SPMI (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, Improvement) cycle, based on the principle of continuous improvement. These include: a) Preparation of Corrective Action Recommendations ; The DPM formulates results-based recommendations: 1) Internal Quality Audit (AMI), 2) Monitoring and Evaluation (Monev), 3) Management Review Meeting (RTM). b) These recommendations are addressed to faculties, study programs, and work units to address non-conformity findings and improve quality performance. c) Preparation of Follow-up Action Plans (RTL) by Work Units. d) Monitoring Follow-up Implementation. e) Improvement of SPMI Standards and Documents. f) Integration of Evaluation Results into Strategic Planning. 4) Quality Culture on Campus ; The quality culture at UMG is based on: a) The Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) with the PPEPP cycle (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, Improvement), b) Islamic and Muhammadiyah Values (AIK) as the basis for ethics and integrity, c) The university's quality policy established by the leadership and overseen by the Directorate of Quality Assurance (DPM).

Furthermore, to ensure the academic quality and curriculum of Muhammadiyah University of Gresik, all leaders and staff are committed to providing quality educational services to produce human resources with noble character and intellectual abilities, personal maturity, expertise, and global communication skills. Continuous improvement is essential for the well-being of humanity. Achieving the best learning university requires an integrated education system with quality resources, encompassing the curriculum, students, faculty, staff, facilities and infrastructure, information, the environment, and appropriate methods.

Regarding the curriculum, UMG's curriculum is designed to be competency-based (behavioral competencies, intellectual competencies and skills based on science and technology, organizational and global communication competencies, and IT-based competencies) and to maximize the learning process, mentoring, and assignments. Learning

elements such as the syllabus, GBPP (Student Activity Guide), SAP (Student Activity Management System), learning resources, and cutting-edge methods are designed to be as effective and comprehensive as possible. Optimizing the utilization of UMG (Gresik Industrialization)'s external learning resources as orientation and materials in the teaching and learning process. Maximizing the use of IT in the teaching and learning process. So that by 2025, the majority of the curriculum in all study programs at the University of Muhammadiyah Gresik will use the Output-Based Education (OBE) curriculum.

UMG continuously strengthens its quality culture through quality assurance socialization and training, Quality Control Group (GKM) development in faculties and study programs, internal auditor refresher training, and integration of quality evaluation results into strategic planning and budgeting. Quality culture is not only the responsibility of DPM, but involves university and faculty leaders as policy makers and quality drivers, lecturers in implementing quality learning, research, and community service, educational staff in effective and efficient administrative services, students as subjects and partners in evaluating the quality of educational services.

In the Management Study Program, self-evaluation is conducted to determine its own performance and situation. This is done through a study program review and analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, constraints, and threats. Quality assurance is achieved through monitoring of learning process activities. This begins with gathering feedback from teachers, students, alumni, and graduate users. Lecturers provide feedback during learning process evaluation meetings, and students, stakeholders, and alumni provide feedback through questionnaires. As a result, the Management Study Program received "excellent" accreditation from LAMEMBA in 2025. This accreditation encourages other study programs at the university.

Quality assurance generally means establishing and complying with management regulations on a regular and continuous basis. Each year, a manual for implementing the Internal Quality Audit (AMI) for the SPMI is required for the AMI implementation. Internal Quality Audits are conducted by the Study Program as part of its ongoing internal quality assurance responsibility for SPMI achievements within the Study Program and overall.

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Furthermore, the AMI for the Study Program is intended to prepare the External Quality Assurance System (SPME) within a five-year period. The educational process or lectures are a component of internal quality assurance.

In the Management Study Program, there are standard operating procedures (SOPs) for the preparation, implementation, data recording, and evaluation of lectures. According to Quality Assurance, teaching quality influences the quality of education in the Management Study Program. In general, documents show that lecturers hold 16 face-to-face lectures each semester. Lecture material must be aligned with the previously prepared Semester Lecture Plan (RPS). One impact of the quality assurance system on learning quality is increased interaction between teachers and students during the learning process, and increased discussions between teachers and students about course assignments, internships, and theses. Furthermore, lecturer quality assurance is assessed based on the academic level of permanent lecturers, which consists of two Associate Lecturers, seven Lecturers, and eight Assistant Experts. Consequently, quality assurance impacts research and community service, namely research conducted by lecturers. Furthermore, there are intensive meetings between the Study Program and permanent lecturers in the Study Program to participate in various service activities. Each lecturer is required to conduct research and serve the community.

External Quality Implementation

An educational institution must obtain recognition and legality from other institutions before it can meet quality standards. External quality assurance is crucial to assess how well an educational institution meets established standards. External quality assurance is used as a means of publicity and accountability to educational institution stakeholders. Accreditation is used in the External Quality Assurance System (SPME) assessment process to determine the eligibility and level of achievement of study programs and higher education institutions [27]. External quality assurance is "a process of sharing experiences and benchmarking against best educational practices," according to[24]. The goal is to achieve diversity, relevance, and excellence through assistance, recommendations,

and advice. Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education regulates the higher education quality assurance system in Indonesia. This law establishes higher education standards, accreditation, and quality assurance. The external quality assurance system is planned, evaluated, implemented, controlled, and developed by the National Accreditation Board (BANPT) and/or the National Accreditation Board (LAM) through accreditation in accordance with their respective authorities. The National Standards for Higher Education (SN Dikti) are the basis for its implementation.

Accreditation is a quality assurance system carried out by an external institution that is part of the higher education quality assurance system [29]. According to [30] accreditation is granted by an independent institution with high integrity and therefore free from influence by vested interests. However, in Indonesia, as mandated by Law Number 12 of 2012, higher education accreditation is carried out by an external institution. The purpose of higher education accreditation is to determine the suitability of higher education institutions and to externally guarantee their quality to protect students and the public [29]

According to [31] the external quality assurance system (SPME) in Indonesia is managed by accreditation institutions established by the government, specifically the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education [27]. Additionally, independent institutions outside higher education recognized by the government can also manage SPME. Accreditation organizations are responsible for ensuring that higher education institutions meet established quality standards and provide high-quality education to the public. According to Law Number 12 of 2012, there are two accreditation implementers, namely: 1. The National Accreditation Board for Higher Education, or BAN-PT, established by the government to independently carry out and develop higher education accreditation; and 2. The Independent Accreditation Institution, or LAM, established by the government or the community to independently carry out study program accreditation.

The seven accreditation standards of the National Accreditation Board (BAN-PT) are used to assess higher education accreditation. These standards are as follows: Vision, Mission, Goals, Targets, and Achievements; Leadership, Governance, Management Systems, and Quality Assurance; Students and Graduates; Human Resources; Curriculum,

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Learning, and Academic Atmosphere; Financing, Infrastructure, and Information Systems; and Research, Community Service, and Cooperation. However, these criteria refer to the National Higher Education Standards (SNPT), which are constantly being amended by applicable regulations. According to [27] Article 4 paragraph (1) states that the planning, implementation, evaluation, control, and development of SPMI and SPME are based on Higher Education Standards, and Article 5 paragraphs (1) and (2) state that SPMI has a PPEPP cycle. The evaluation referred to in paragraph (1) letter c is conducted through an Internal Quality Audit (AMI), which produces outputs in accordance with Article 3 paragraph (2) of the Ministerial Regulation.

To graduate students and issue diplomas, study programs must have first-rate, accredited, or superior accreditation status, according to Article 70 of the Minister of Education and Science and Technology Regulation No. 39. In cases where a higher education institution is accredited by BAN-PT, the accreditation output results in the following accreditation statuses: 1) Accredited (meets the Higher Education Standards (SN Dikti), 2) Accredited Superior (exceeds the SN Dikti set by BAN-PT), 3) Not Accredited (does not meet the SN Dikti). Study programs can be accredited by LAM/BAN-PT. The accreditation statuses are: 1) Accredited (meets the SN Dikti), 2) Accredited Superior (exceeds the SN Dikti set by BAN-PT), 3) Not Accredited (Does Not Meet SN Dikti). According to the Director of the Quality Assurance Directorate muhammadiyah university of Gresik, a successful External Quality Assurance System (SPME) must consist of several essential elements. First, it requires experienced and trained experts in quality assurance. This requires funding for training. Furthermore, a good SPME requires adequate infrastructure, such as robust IT infrastructure, well-equipped laboratories, and a library with adequate collections. To support effective learning and research processes, technological support and stable and fast internet access are required.

Second, a quality SPME must collaborate with the government, industry, accreditation agencies, and other educational institutions. This collaboration will help universities improve the relevance of their curriculum and obtain resource support.

Furthermore, SPME must be supported by strong policies and a commitment from university management to continuously improve the quality of education and meet accreditation standards. Alignment of SPMI and SPME is crucial for implementing Internal Quality Assurance in Higher Education because SPME accreditation is part of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System. Accreditation is granted to study programs and higher education institutions based on the interaction between higher education standards, demonstrating that the program meets the standards set by the National Higher Education Standards. According to [32], a company's success or failure depends on its competitive advantage over its competitors. To survive and thrive, every company must have the ability to create and maintain a competitive advantage in its industry. This concept also applies to higher education institutions, especially private higher education institutions (PTS). Based on this idea, PTS managers must continuously evaluate their PTS' competitive position and take specific actions as needed to improve their position [33]

A PTS that can improve its competitive advantage will at least attract students and attract prospective students. In 2024, based on the ranking issued by Webometrics, UMG succeeded in occupying the 97th rank of PTS and PTN in Indonesia, as well as the 11th rank of Muhammadiyah/ Aisyiyah Higher Education Institutions (PTMA) in Indonesia, and the 1st rank of PTS in Gresik [34]Muhammadiyah University of Gresik has succeeded in becoming the number one best private university in Gresik thanks to the commitment of the university management to continuously improve the quality of education and meet the established accreditation standards. Muhammadiyah University of Gresik (UMG) has once again suspended its superiority among private universities in Indonesia, according to information quoted from the public relations page umg.ac.id. At the Muhammadiyah Aisyiyah Higher Education (PTMA) in East Java Province, UMG is currently ranked 4th. In addition, the SINTA website shows that UMG is ranked first among all state and private universities in Gresik, with an institutional accreditation of "very good" and several study programs with "superior" accreditation, such as the Management Program, Nutrition Program, Teacher Professional Education Program, Islamic Religion Program, Mathematics Program, and Agrotechnology Program.

The systematic and sustainable management of the Quality Assurance System (SPMI) at UMG has significantly improved the quality of study program and institutional accreditation. The implementation of the PPEPP (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement) cycle ensures that all higher education standards are consistently implemented and well-documented. This strengthens the availability and validity of accreditation evidence, thus improving the institution's readiness for external assessments by BAN-PT and LAM. Furthermore, the Internal Quality Audit (AMI) and Management Review Meeting (RTM) serve as effective evaluative instruments for identifying weaknesses and implementing improvements prior to the accreditation process.

The Quality Assurance System (SPMI) plays a role in building accountable, transparent, and data-driven institutional governance. Clear quality standards encourage each work unit at UMG to operate according to procedures, performance targets, and measurable achievement indicators. This integrated quality management improves the efficiency of academic and non-academic processes and strengthens inter-unit coordination, ultimately enhancing overall institutional performance. Effective SPMI management enhances UMG's competitiveness through: 1) Increased public trust, as reflected in improved accreditation results, 2) Increased interest from prospective students due to the institution's credible and high-quality image, 3) Strengthened collaborative networks with industry, government, and other universities, 4) Improved graduate quality, making it more relevant to the needs of the workforce and society.

The Head of the External Quality Assurance Center (SPME) of the UMG Student Executive Board (DPM UMG) also plays a strategic role in bridging internal quality and external assessments, overseeing accreditation improvements, and strengthening the institution's competitiveness and reputation. This role is key to UMG's success in realizing sustainable, nationally standardized quality governance. Thus, SPMI serves not only as an internal quality control instrument but also as an institutional strategy in facing competition in higher education.

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Discussion

Quality assurance is defined as a continuous and systematic effort to maintain and improve quality [31] ; [28] Conversely, as stated by [24] quality assurance is the plans, actions, and procedures used to ensure the quality of education can be maintained and improved. The higher education accreditation process is also associated with quality assurance [22]]; [21] Expressed a different opinion, stating that quality assurance is also the result of an evaluation that is sometimes unrelated to the accreditation function [19] Quality in higher education is a relative, subjective, and multidimensional concept, and is not a measure of outcomes but of the impact on the institution[18]

According to [17] the way a company chooses and implements generic strategies within its business is related to its competitive advantage. According [13] the value a company can create for its customers exceeds the costs the company incurs to create it. Value is the amount buyers are willing to pay for what the company provides. Superior value can come from offering a lower price than competitors for comparable benefits or from providing additional benefits in addition to a higher price. In addition, good strategy formulation can provide accuracy and increase competitive strategies [32]

This study provides critical insights into the strategic role of internal quality assurance in strengthening the competitiveness of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) in Indonesia. The findings suggest that quality development is not merely a technical or administrative process but represents an institutional transformation agenda that determines long-term sustainability. While the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) has been formally adopted by most PHEIs, its effectiveness varies considerably depending on the depth of institutional commitment and governance integration.

The implementation of the PPEPP cycle emerges as a pivotal yet contested mechanism. Although PPEPP is conceptually designed to ensure continuous quality improvement, the findings reveal that its application in many PHEIs remains procedural rather than reflective. Evaluation and control stages are often conducted to fulfill documentation requirements for accreditation rather than to generate critical institutional

learning. This condition limits the transformative potential of PPEPP, reducing it to a compliance-oriented cycle instead of a strategic quality management framework.

This phenomenon reflects a broader structural tension within Indonesian higher education quality assurance, where external accreditation pressures tend to dominate internal quality logic. Accreditation, while essential for public accountability, frequently becomes the primary institutional objective. As a result, quality assurance practices are oriented toward short-term accreditation performance rather than long-term quality enhancement. The findings of this study indicate that PHEIs achieving sustainable competitiveness are those that reposition accreditation as an outcome of internal quality maturity, not as the main driver of institutional behavior.

From a competitiveness perspective, accreditation status undeniably influences public trust, student recruitment, and institutional legitimacy. However, the study demonstrates that accreditation alone does not guarantee competitive advantage. PHEIs with similar accreditation levels often display significantly different academic performance and stakeholder satisfaction. This suggests that competitiveness is shaped not by accreditation labels, but by the institutional capacity to continuously improve teaching quality, curriculum relevance, and graduate employability through effective SPMI implementation.

Leadership plays a decisive role in mediating this relationship. The findings highlight that quality assurance becomes impactful only when institutional leaders treat SPMI as part of strategic governance rather than as a supporting administrative unit. Transformational leadership fosters alignment between institutional vision, quality policy, and operational practices, enabling SPMI to function as an instrument of organizational learning. In contrast, weak leadership commitment results in fragmented quality practices and symbolic compliance.

The development of a quality culture further differentiates high-performing PHEIs from those struggling to compete. Quality culture is not produced through formal regulations alone but through continuous engagement, shared values, and reflective practices among academic staff. The study reveals that when lecturers perceive quality assurance as externally

imposed control, resistance and minimal compliance tend to emerge. Conversely, when quality assurance is framed as academic responsibility, it stimulates innovation, ownership, and continuous improvement.

These findings raise critical implications for national quality assurance policy. The strong emphasis on accreditation outcomes may inadvertently encourage performative behavior, where institutions prioritize documentation over substance. This study argues that strengthening SPMI should not be viewed merely as preparation for accreditation, but as a core strategy for institutional competitiveness and academic excellence. Without such reorientation, quality assurance risks becoming ritualistic, undermining its intended developmental purpose.

In the broader context of higher education competition, Indonesian PHEIs face structural disadvantages compared to public universities, including limited funding and weaker public legitimacy. Therefore, competitiveness for PHEIs must be constructed through internal differentiation strategies, particularly through quality-driven governance, adaptive curricula, and strong quality assurance systems. In this sense, SPMI functions not only as a regulatory instrument but as a strategic capability that enables PHEIs to survive and compete in an increasingly market-oriented higher education environment.

Overall, this study emphasizes that sustainable competitiveness in Indonesian private higher education cannot be achieved through episodic accreditation success. Instead, it requires a paradigm shift from compliance-based quality assurance toward reflective, learning-oriented, and strategically embedded SPMI implementation. Such transformation positions quality not as an obligation, but as an institutional asset that continuously generates competitive value.

Conclusion

The implementation and alignment of SPMI and SPME are crucial for implementing Internal and External Quality Assurance in Higher Education. SPME accreditation is part of the Higher Education Quality Assurance System and is conducted based on the interaction between Higher Education Standards to determine the eligibility of Study Programs and

Higher Education Institutions. Muhammadiyah University of Gresik (UMG) has ensured quality by creating a culture of quality and enhancing competitiveness. UMG has maintained its excellence by improving its ranking in the SINTA Ranking among private universities in Indonesia. According to the SINTA website, UMG currently ranks fourth among Muhammadiyah Aisyiyah Universities (PTMA) in East Java Province. Furthermore, UMG ranks first among all public and private universities in Gresik, with "very good" institutional accreditation and several study programs with "excellent" accreditation, such as management, nutrition, teacher professional education, Islamic religion, and mathematics. UMG's SPMI management has had a positive and strategic impact on improving accreditation results and strengthening the institution's competitiveness. Through a well-planned, implemented, and continuously evaluated quality system, UMG has strengthened governance, increased public trust, and positioned itself as a competitive, quality-oriented university.

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