

Integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) and Strategic Management in Enhancing Educational Quality

Feri Apriansah, Muhammad Ruvi Anugerah, Muhammad Syaifuddin

Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau

apriansahferi59@gmail.com, 12110310436@students.uin-suska.ac.id, muhammadsyaifudin74@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the operational forms of integrating Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic management, as well as to identify the factors that support their maximum effectiveness in improving educational quality. The study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through in depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The data were subsequently analyzed using the interactive analysis model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, while the trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that the integration of TQM and strategic management is systematically realized through structural and functional alignment across leadership, academic, and administrative dimensions. In this integration, TQM principles serve as the driving force that animates and guides the entire strategic management process within the institution. The study further identifies five key factors that support the maximum effectiveness of this integration: visionary leadership commitment, an institutionalized quality culture, competent human resources, effective information systems, and the consistent implementation of continuous evaluation cycles. These findings contribute to the development of an evidence based educational management model and provide a practical reference for other educational institutions seeking to achieve high quality, inclusive, and sustainable education in line with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.

Keywords: Total Quality Management (TQM); strategic management; educational quality; quality culture; sustainable education.

(*) Corresponding Author: yulian.dinihari@unindra.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Numerous educational institutions have demonstrated that the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic management can generate outstanding educational outcomes. Schools and higher education institutions that have implemented this integration have reported significant improvements in student achievement, staff performance, institutional accreditation scores, and stakeholder satisfaction. Systematic planning, continuous quality monitoring, and structured strategy implementation have become integral components of institutional daily operations, resulting in academic and administrative systems that function effectively and efficiently (Texeira Quiros et al., 2022; Rosyidah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, these institutions have developed robust internal quality assurance mechanisms aligned with their long term strategic objectives. Data driven decision making, active leadership in cultivating a quality oriented culture, and the commitment of academic personnel to continuous improvement have become defining characteristics of their

organizational practices (Nugraha et al., 2023). The alignment between operational activities and strategic targets has enabled these institutions not only to meet but consistently exceed national educational quality standards.

As a result, institutions adopting this integrated approach have achieved optimal performance indicators, including high graduation rates, improved learning outcomes, strong institutional rankings, and increased public trust (Parveen et al., 2024; Al Zoubi et al., 2023). Such achievements are not accidental but rather systematic, reflecting a deeply institutionalized quality culture and strategic mindset across all organizational levels.

From a theoretical perspective, achieving consistently high institutional quality through the integration of TQM and strategic management is considered difficult and relatively rare. Scholars argue that implementing TQM in educational settings is often constrained by persistent structural barriers, including resistance to change, inadequate leadership commitment, and misalignment between quality frameworks and institutional culture (Yahiaoui et al., 2022). Strategic management in education is equally complex, requiring the alignment of dynamic capabilities that many institutions struggle to sustain over time (Mensah, 2020). The synthesis of these two frameworks demands simultaneous transformation at cultural, structural, and operational levels, a condition that is seldom fully realized in practice (Syaifullah et al., 2023). Furthermore, scholars caution that without deeply embedded quality values and adaptive strategic leadership, TQM strategic integration tends to remain superficial and unsustainable (Palah et al., 2022). Existing theoretical perspectives suggest that achieving full integration and optimal outcomes requires sustained institutional maturity and continuous reform efforts (Nogueiro & Saraiva, 2023).

A significant gap exists between these theoretical expectations and the empirical reality observed in the institution examined in this study. While theory suggests that fully integrated TQM–strategic management systems are difficult to achieve due to structural, cultural, and leadership constraints, the institution under investigation has demonstrably attained such integration with measurable success. This contradiction raises a fundamental question: What specific mechanisms, contextual factors, or leadership dynamics enable this institution to transcend theoretical limitations and achieve what the literature considers an exceptional accomplishment?

This gap is not merely an academic issue but also an indication that existing theoretical frameworks may be insufficient to explain the performance of high achieving educational institutions within particular contextual settings. Consequently, the central research problem emerges: How is the integration of TQM and strategic management operationalized, and what factors explain its maximum effectiveness in enhancing educational quality within this institution?

Previous studies have explored TQM and strategic management as independent constructs within educational contexts. Several investigations have examined the effects of TQM on teacher performance, student satisfaction, and accreditation outcomes (Parveen et al., 2024; Rosyidah et al., 2024; Al Zoubi et al., 2023; Syaifullah et al., 2023; Nogueiro & Saraiva, 2023). Separately, research on strategic management in education has focused on vision alignment, institutional planning, and competitive positioning (Mensah, 2020; Geletu & Deksissa, 2024; Palah et al., 2022). Collectively, these studies confirm that both frameworks independently contribute to institutional quality improvement; however, they have not sufficiently addressed the systemic integration of the two frameworks as a unified operational model.

Recent studies have begun to explore intersections between TQM and strategic frameworks, yet critical gaps remain. Existing research on integrated quality strategy models often concentrates on specific dimensions, such as leadership style or curriculum alignment, without capturing the integration ecosystem as a whole (Yahiaoui et al., 2022;

Texeira Quiros et al., 2022; Nugraha et al., 2023; Ardianti et al., 2024; Fadhilah & Wasliman, 2026; Rosidin, 2025). None of these studies comprehensively analyzes how TQM principles and strategic management processes are structurally embedded across all institutional layers to generate optimal and sustainable quality outcomes. This study addresses that gap by offering a context based and comprehensive analysis of full TQM strategic integration in actual practice.

The novelty of this study lies in proposing an integrated TQM strategic management model grounded in empirical evidence from an educational institution that has demonstrably achieved optimal quality outcomes. Unlike previous studies that examined these frameworks separately or in partial combinations, this research develops an integrated operational framework derived from authentic institutional practices, moving beyond theoretical prescriptions toward evidence based modeling. This contribution directly supports Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on Quality Education by generating replicable insights that may guide other institutions toward systemic and sustainable quality transformation (Nogueiro & Saraiva, 2023; Oktavia et al., 2025).

The urgency of this research is reinforced by the global imperative to reduce educational quality disparities, particularly in developing countries where institutional performance consistency remains a major challenge. As nations strive to achieve SDG 4 and ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, understanding the factors that enable institutions to achieve peak performance becomes increasingly important (Mensah, 2020; Geletu & Deksissa, 2024). Without empirical research explaining how and why integrated quality strategic management succeeds in practice, policymakers and institutional leaders lack an adequate evidence base for designing effective and scalable reform strategies. This study seeks to provide such an impact oriented knowledge foundation.

This study is guided by two central research questions. The first concerns the operational form of TQM and strategic management integration within the institution under investigation, specifically examining how the two frameworks are structurally and functionally integrated across academic, administrative, and leadership dimensions to generate measurable quality improvements. The second explores the supporting factors that enable this integration to achieve maximum effectiveness by examining the institutional, cultural, and leadership conditions that distinguish this case from theoretical expectations and from other institutions that have attempted similar integrations with more limited success.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. This approach was selected because it enables an in depth exploration of the phenomenon of TQM and strategic management integration as it occurs within the context of the educational institution under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through three primary techniques. First, in depth interviews were conducted with institutional leaders, quality assurance managers, and teaching staff. Second, participant observation was undertaken to examine strategic planning processes and the implementation of quality management systems. Third, document analysis was conducted on institutional quality policies, strategic plans, accreditation reports, and other relevant administrative records (Nugraha et al., 2023). These three techniques were applied simultaneously to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how TQM and strategic management were integrated in actual institutional practice.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analytical process focused on identifying integration patterns, implementation mechanisms, and factors contributing to institutional quality improvement. Through iterative and reflective analysis, recurring themes and relationships among the data sources were systematically examined to construct a comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon under study.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed both source triangulation and methodological triangulation (Fadhilah & Wasliman, 2026; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data obtained from different participants were compared and cross validated, while information gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis was examined for consistency. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and scientific rigor of the research findings.

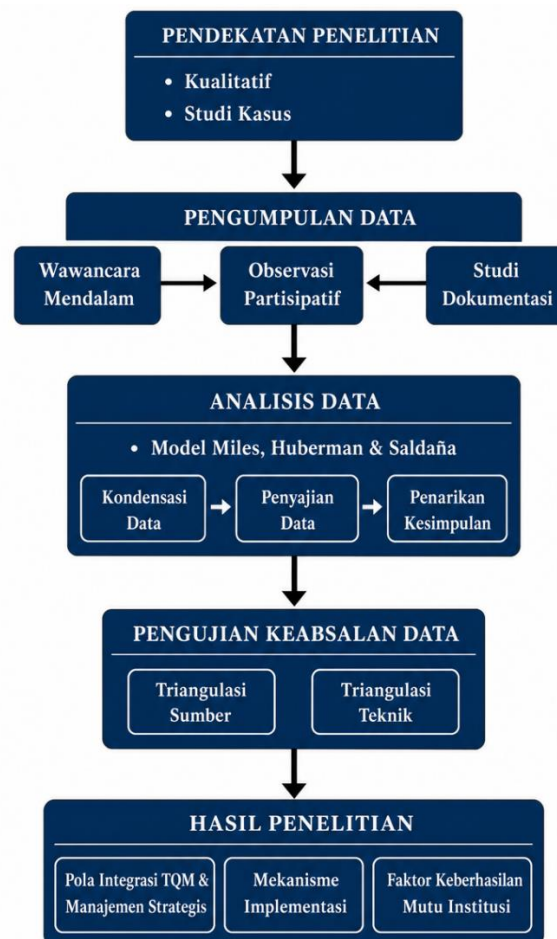


Figure 1. Research Methodological Framework

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The findings reveal that the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic management within the investigated institution is neither partial nor incidental.

Rather, it has been systematically developed through structural and functional alignment encompassing all institutional dimensions. Within the leadership dimension, institutional leaders serve as the primary driving force in actively aligning TQM quality values with the institution's vision, mission, and strategic objectives. Leadership extends beyond administrative functions and adopts a transformational character, encouraging all organizational members to understand and internalize a quality culture as part of the institution's identity. Every strategic decision is formulated based on established quality indicators, ensuring that strategic direction and quality standards remain fully integrated.



Figure 2. Operational Forms of TQM and Strategic Management Integration in Enhancing Educational Quality

At the structural level, the institution has established an internal quality assurance mechanism directly integrated with the strategic planning cycle. A dedicated quality assurance unit functions not merely as a supervisory body but as a strategic partner throughout the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of institutional programs. Quality standards derived from TQM principles, including customer focus, continuous improvement, and total employee involvement, are translated into measurable performance indicators and incorporated into the institution's strategic planning documents. Consequently, TQM is not implemented as an additional program but functions as the guiding force underlying the entire strategic management process.

Within the academic dimension, this integration is reflected in curriculum design, learning evaluation systems, and professional development programs for educators. The curriculum is developed based on national quality standards while simultaneously addressing the needs of external stakeholders, reflecting the TQM principle of customer focus aligned with the institution's medium term strategic goals. Learning evaluations are conducted periodically, and the results are utilized as strategic decision making inputs rather than merely administrative reports. Likewise, professional development initiatives are designed through gap analyses linked directly to strategic objectives, ensuring that each training program contributes to targeted quality outcomes. As a result, academic activities

are not carried out mechanically but are directed toward planned and measurable quality improvement.

Within the administrative dimension, institutional governance is implemented through principles of transparency, accountability, and efficiency, which constitute the core values of quality oriented strategic management. Standardized workflows, systematic documentation procedures, and structured reporting mechanisms enable real time monitoring and evaluation of strategic goal attainment. Administrative data are actively utilized during periodic management review meetings, where institutional leaders and unit heads collectively evaluate performance, identify challenges, and adjust strategic actions. The Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle, which forms the foundation of TQM, is fully embedded in daily managerial practices rather than remaining merely a conceptual framework documented in policy manuals.

The findings identify several key factors that collectively contribute to the maximum effectiveness of TQM and strategic management integration within the institution.

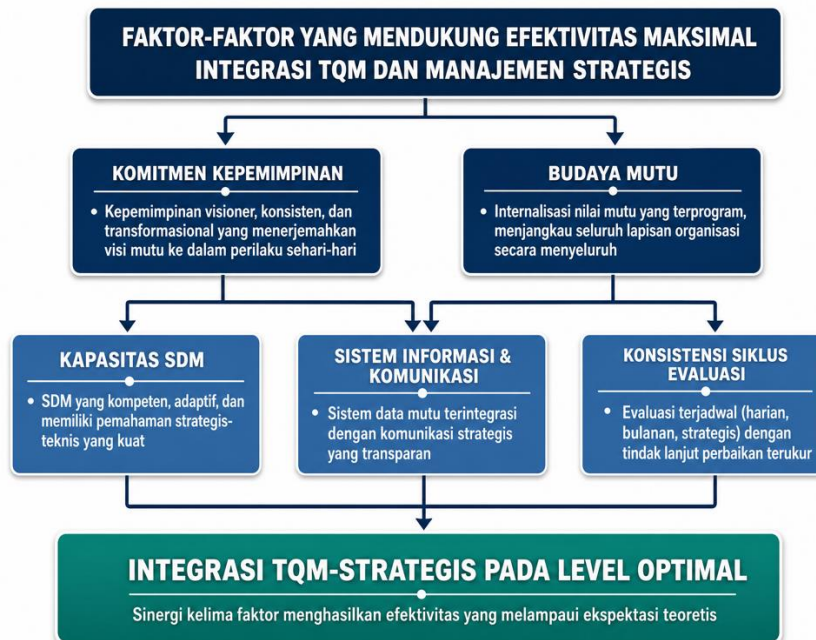


Figure 3. Factors Supporting the Maximum Effectiveness of TQM and Strategic Management Integration

The first and most influential factor is consistent and visionary leadership commitment. Institutional leaders demonstrate not only conceptual understanding of TQM and strategic management but also the ability to translate these principles into everyday leadership practices. This commitment is reflected in their direct involvement in quality evaluation processes, firmness in enforcing quality standards, and capacity to communicate the institution’s quality vision consistently and inspirationally. Such leadership fosters an organizational climate in which quality is perceived not merely as an external requirement but as an internally shared necessity.

The second factor is a deeply institutionalized quality culture. This culture has evolved through a long term process of systematic value internalization. Academic and administrative staff share a common understanding of quality standards and actively participate in continuous improvement initiatives. Quality management and operational responsibilities are not viewed as separate domains but as interconnected elements of

institutional practice. Consequently, quality becomes an individual and collective value rather than a compliance obligation.

The third factor is the presence of competent and adaptive human resources. The institution continuously invests in professional development through both internal and external training programs. These initiatives focus not only on pedagogical and technical competencies but also on quality management systems and strategic thinking capabilities. As a result, personnel understand not only their operational responsibilities but also their contributions to broader institutional quality objectives.

The fourth factor is an effective institutional information and communication system. The institution has established an integrated quality data management system that enables timely and accurate access to information for decision makers. Effective communication among quality assurance units, leadership teams, and operational units ensures rapid responses to quality related issues. Furthermore, strategic goals, quality targets, and institutional performance indicators are communicated transparently, creating a strong sense of collective ownership and encouraging active participation in quality enhancement efforts.

The fifth factor is consistency in evaluation and continuous improvement cycles. Evaluation activities are conducted systematically and according to established schedules, ranging from daily classroom evaluations to monthly unit reviews and institution wide strategic evaluations. Evaluation findings are consistently followed by concrete improvement programs with clearly defined objectives and timelines. No evaluation outcome is left unaddressed. This consistency strengthens trust in the effectiveness of the system and encourages honest and constructive participation in all evaluation processes. Collectively, these five factors explain why the institution has been able to surpass theoretical expectations and achieve an optimal level of TQM–strategic management integration.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the successful integration of TQM and strategic management is not merely the result of implementing managerial procedures but rather the outcome of a holistic institutional transformation. The evidence demonstrates that quality management principles have become structurally embedded within leadership, academic, and administrative processes. This finding supports the argument of Nogueiro and Saraiva (2023) that sustainable quality improvement requires the alignment of strategic planning with institutional quality systems rather than the implementation of isolated quality initiatives.

The central role of leadership identified in this study reinforces previous findings emphasizing the importance of transformational and strategic leadership in sustaining quality oriented organizational change (Yahiaoui et al., 2022; Palah et al., 2022). Unlike institutions where quality assurance functions operate separately from strategic planning, the investigated institution demonstrates a model in which leadership acts as a bridge connecting strategic direction with quality implementation. This alignment appears to be a critical mechanism enabling the institution to overcome many of the barriers commonly reported in the literature.

The institutionalization of quality culture also emerges as a significant explanatory factor. Consistent with the findings of Syaifullah et al. (2023), the study reveals that quality improvement becomes sustainable when quality values are internalized throughout the organization. Rather than relying on external accountability pressures, institutional members actively engage in continuous improvement because quality has become an

integral component of organizational identity. This observation challenges assumptions that educational institutions inherently struggle to maintain long term quality commitments.

Another notable finding concerns the role of human resource capacity. The institution's continuous investment in professional development supports the argument that quality transformation depends not only on systems and procedures but also on the competencies of individuals responsible for implementing them. This finding aligns with previous studies highlighting the importance of professional competence and strategic capability in achieving institutional excellence (Parveen et al., 2024; Nugraha et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the integration of information systems and evaluation mechanisms demonstrates the practical realization of the TQM principle of continuous improvement. The systematic use of data in strategic decision making reflects the characteristics of evidence based management, which has been identified as a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness in educational settings (Texeira Quiros et al., 2022). The institution's ability to translate evaluation findings into corrective actions further illustrates how quality assurance processes can function as strategic management tools rather than compliance mechanisms.

Overall, the findings suggest that the effectiveness of TQM–strategic management integration stems from the interaction of leadership commitment, quality culture, human resource competence, information systems, and continuous evaluation. These elements operate not independently but as an interconnected ecosystem. This study therefore contributes a context based operational model demonstrating how educational institutions can achieve sustainable quality transformation through the comprehensive integration of quality management and strategic management principles.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic management within the investigated institution has been realized systematically and comprehensively through structural and functional alignment across leadership, academic, and administrative dimensions. Transformational leadership, an institutionalized quality culture, competent human resources, effective information systems, and consistent evaluation cycles collectively constitute the foundation of this integration. Consequently, the institution has succeeded in surpassing theoretical expectations by achieving educational quality outcomes that are measurable, sustainable, and continuously improved. These findings demonstrate that when implemented comprehensively, the integration of TQM and strategic management can fundamentally transform educational institutions.

More broadly, the findings have significant implications for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all. The integration model identified in this study provides a practical reference for other educational institutions, particularly in developing countries, seeking to establish quality management systems that extend beyond formal compliance and generate meaningful improvements in learning quality and institutional capacity. Accordingly, this study contributes not only to the advancement of educational management scholarship but also to the broader global agenda of sustainable educational development.

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