



Strengthening a Sustainable Quality Culture in Education through School Self-Evaluation (SSE)

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ABSTRACT

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School Self-Evaluation, Educational Quality, Quality Assurance, Sustainable Quality Culture, Continuous Improvement, School Management, Evidence-Based Planning

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This article examines the strategic role of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) in strengthening a sustainable quality culture in educational institutions. The main objective of this study is to analyse how SSE functions as an internal quality assurance mechanism that identifies institutional strengths and weaknesses while guiding continuous improvement efforts. This article synthesises research findings, policy documents, and theoretical perspectives on educational quality, quality assurance systems, and school-based evaluation practices. The results indicate that SSE provides schools with valid and comprehensive data for decision-making, supports evidence-based planning, and promotes collaborative reflection among school stakeholders. Furthermore, SSE contributes to the development of a sustainable quality culture by embedding consistent monitoring, evaluation, and follow-up actions within school management processes. However, challenges such as limited evaluator competence, insufficient understanding of instruments, and resistance to change may hinder its optimal implementation. The findings imply that capacity building, stakeholder involvement, and policy support are essential to maximise the impact of SSE on school quality improvement.

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INTRODUCTION

The commitment to delivering high-quality education has transitioned from a mere regulatory compliance issue to a central, non-negotiable agenda across all educational institutions globally, which is particularly salient within Islamic education where the imperative is to seamlessly blend academic rigor with the cultivation of profound religious and moral character, thereby creating a complex dual mandate that often surpasses the scope of standard quality

management models; this pursuit of excellence necessitates a paradigm shift, moving beyond conventional quality assurance mechanisms to the deliberate establishment of a self-sustaining quality culture that fundamentally reorients organizational behavior and embeds evidence-based reflection into daily operational practices, consequently highlighting a crucial gap where existing quality theories often treat culture as a dependent variable rather than an actively managed strategic lever; the core theoretical disconnect therefore lies in understanding how schools in non-Western, value-driven contexts can systematically integrate internal reflective mechanisms like School Self-Evaluation (SSE) to bridge this performance-value chasm, defining why the current models, which prioritize external metrics, consistently fail to capture the nuanced, intrinsic dimensions of quality unique to Islamic schools, and establishing what organizational and leadership factors must be actively cultivated to ensure SSE catalyzes a genuine, bottom-up cultural transformation instead of remaining a top-down administrative exercise; accordingly, while global reports consistently indicate persistent, alarming gaps in both general student achievement and institutional effectiveness, specifically afflicting Indonesian Islamic schools (Tohir, 2019), the theoretical instruments available to diagnose and sustainably remedy these deficiencies remain inadequate, underscoring the urgent need for a framework that elevates SSE to a transformative tool capable of internalizing and actualizing the aspirational goals of holistic Islamic education.

The descriptive literature surrounding quality assurance in education generally posits internal evaluation as an indispensable component of effective institutional management, detailing how systematic reflection on performance metrics, resource utilization, and student outcomes serves as the engine for continuous improvement cycles, thereby providing a foundational understanding of the technical function and inherent value proposition of tools like School Self-Evaluation (SSE); this body of work extensively covers the structural elements of internal quality assurance (IQA), delineating processes, standard operating procedures, and the necessary inputs such as data collection methodologies and indicator alignment with national benchmarks, consequently establishing a robust, yet primarily mechanistic, view of IQA as a bureaucratic system for documenting compliance and identifying surface-level defects, which decisively limits its capacity to explain the variance in long-term school effectiveness; furthermore, much of this descriptive analysis highlights the critical role of stakeholder involvement encompassing teachers, staff, and leadership in the success of IQA implementation, accurately portraying their

engagement as a necessary condition for data validity and procedural adherence, yet simultaneously providing scant detail on the deeper sociological and psychological processes required to turn mere procedural involvement into genuine psychological ownership and collective responsibility for quality, which indicates a significant descriptive deficiency concerning the behavioral integration of quality principles; therefore, while the established literature provides necessary clarity on the administrative what and how of internal evaluation, it remains conceptually weak in articulating the dynamic, soft-management processes particularly those related to leadership practices and organizational culture that translate cyclical SSE activities into a permanent, self-regulating quality mindset and a sustainable, embedded organizational culture, necessitating a shift towards a more interpretive and context-aware descriptive framework.

This specific study is contextually situated within the distinct operational and philosophical environment of Islamic educational institutions, where the inherent duality of fulfilling both secular academic accreditation and non-secular spiritual mandates creates unique complexities for quality management, thereby establishing a specialized analytical field that differs significantly from mainstream public or private schooling; the scope is precisely defined to focus on the interrelationships between School Self-Evaluation (SSE) outcomes and the resulting adjustments in three critical organizational dimensions: leadership practices (specifically transformational and ethical leadership), organizational behavior (focusing on shared values and collective efficacy), and evidence-based decision-making (analyzing the utilization of SSE data for strategic planning), consequently ensuring the investigation maintains a targeted analytical depth capable of producing highly relevant and nuanced theoretical outputs; furthermore, limiting the scope to internal processes within these value-driven schools allows for a rigorous isolation of the variables related to cultivating a sustainable quality culture, enabling the research to specifically examine how Islamic principles of *ihsan* (excellence) and *amanah* (trustworthiness) are operationalized and reinforced through the reflective cycles of SSE, rather than being constrained by the broad administrative requirements of external compliance, which is crucial for advancing context-specific quality scholarship; therefore, by focusing rigorously on this specialized institutional context and these three organizational variables, this research aims to generate a framework that is both theoretically sound for organizational science and practically applicable to educational administrators seeking to align quality management with deeply embedded religious and moral values, providing a targeted solution

to a persistent dilemma in faith-based education management.

Previous studies have unequivocally highlighted the inherent value of internal evaluation processes like SSE for organizational quality improvement, requiring a systematic review of these findings to pinpoint where the current research can most meaningfully contribute to the field; specifically, Barnawi & Arifin (2017) robustly emphasized that the effectiveness of internal quality assurance is strongly mediated by the efficacy of school leadership and the level of teacher engagement, yet their scope did not extend to analyzing the long-term sustainability of the culture generated by these factors, thereby limiting their theoretical reach to immediate implementation success; concurrently, Baharun & Zamroni (2017) compellingly demonstrated that collaboration among diverse stakeholders fundamentally enhances the perceived and actual quality outcomes in Islamic educational institutions, but their analysis remained descriptive, failing to provide a predictive model for how this collaborative behavior could be deliberately engineered or consistently maintained through cyclical SSE processes, leaving a gap in prescriptive strategy; Firdaus et al. (n.d.) further asserted that the use of SSE data significantly improves the strategic planning process by enabling data-driven improvement programs, yet their work largely treated SSE as a discrete data input rather than a continuous, institutionalized cultural phenomenon, consequently neglecting the behavioral aspects that determine data integrity and utilization; additional research by Ali (2019) focused on the administrative burden of SSE, revealing a frequent perception of the tool as purely compliance-driven, while Hassan (2020) linked SSE directly to improved classroom pedagogical quality, yet both studies stopped short of examining the necessary cultural precursors for SSE to be embraced as a transformative asset; finally, contributions by Sudarsana (2021) on decision-making transparency and Wibowo (2022) on the ethical dimensions of educational leadership, while relevant, only implicitly connect these factors to a formal mechanism like SSE, confirming that while valuable, the collective prior scholarship approaches SSE primarily as an administrative or immediate procedural requirement, demonstrating a critical and widespread theoretical failure to conceptualize SSE as a genuine, long-term catalyst for organizational and cultural transformation, which necessitates a more integrative, synthesis-driven investigation.

A pronounced and critical research gap emerges from the synthesized literature review, revolving around the extremely limited conceptual and empirical examination of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) as a fundamental catalyst for long-term organizational change and the deep-seated institutionalization of a

sustainable quality culture, particularly within the value-sensitive context of Islamic education, which this research intends to directly address with a novel, integrative approach; this conspicuous theoretical failure stems from previous research's methodological preference for studying SSE as a singular, periodic event designed for external reporting compliance (as opposed to an endogenous, continuous reflective cycle), thereby failing to capture its profound recursive effects on daily leadership practices, staff psychological safety, and the underlying organizational value system, consequently leaving scholars without a robust model that can explain the variance between superficial compliance and genuine cultural commitment; the novelty of this research is emphatically established through its unique conceptual positioning of SSE not merely as an evaluative instrument but as a strategic driver for embedding enduring quality cultural traits across the entire organization, demanding an analytical lens that moves beyond performance outputs to process inputs and organizational psychology; this article, therefore, presents an unprecedented integrative analysis linking the cyclical use of SSE data directly with shifts in ethical leadership orientations, collaborative organizational behavior patterns, and the formalization of evidence-based decision-making protocols, areas that are rarely if ever explored together in previous studies, subsequently promising to fundamentally redefine the state of the art in quality assurance theory within Islamic educational management by providing a cohesive, actionable framework; by successfully linking these previously disparate constructs, the study offers a powerful, consolidated theoretical tool that can explain how reflective practice is not just assessed, but deeply internalized.

The foundational purpose of this investigation is to rigorously examine the identified conceptual gaps and establish a comprehensive understanding of the transformative potential of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) by addressing three strategic, interconnected research objectives that collectively guide the entire empirical and theoretical scope of the study, ensuring the outcomes are both academically robust and managerially relevant; this primary objective is systematically achieved by first aiming (1) to analyze the strategic role of School Self-Evaluation in strengthening and institutionalizing a sustainable quality culture within Islamic educational organizations, which seeks to map the causal relationship between the frequency and quality of SSE implementation and the observable persistence of quality-focused behaviors and leadership commitment over time; the second key objective is (2) to review and synthesize existing studies related to internal quality assurance and SSE within Islamic educational institutions, which serves to establish the empirical baseline, critique the current

theoretical boundaries, and formally position this research as the necessary theoretical successor capable of bridging the disciplinary fragmentation in the literature, consequently ensuring methodological rigor and historical continuity; finally, the research aims (3) to formulate theoretical and practical implications for leadership, organizational behaviour, and decision-making, which will translate the conceptual findings from the integrated analysis into concrete, actionable recommendations for educational practitioners and policymakers, thereby fulfilling the study's obligation to contribute tangible, real-world utility alongside its theoretical advancements; collectively, these stated objectives clearly delineate the investigative focus, which centers on establishing SSE not as a stand-alone task, but as a deeply embedded, culturally sensitive process that shapes the very fabric of institutional governance, moving the academic conversation from descriptive reporting to prescriptive cultural engineering.

The definitive original contribution of this research lies in its empirical testing and theoretical validation of the argument that organizational culture and leadership efficacy, as measured by their alignment with Islamic values, serve as the primary mediators through which School Self-Evaluation (SSE) successfully transitions from an administrative requirement into a sustainable quality culture driver, thereby offering a crucial corrective to models that prioritize technical compliance over cultural resonance in non-Western, value-driven contexts; this contribution is fundamentally supported by the central argument (the primary hypothesis) which states: "The positive effect of School Self-Evaluation on long-term institutional performance is significantly and positively moderated by the degree to which school leadership exhibits ethical and transformational practices and by the maturity of the school's quality-focused organizational culture," which posits that institutionalization is a function of behavioral and cultural readiness, not merely procedural completeness; this novel framework fundamentally challenges the prevailing technocratic view of quality management by asserting that the reflective data generated by SSE will only translate into sustained improvement if the organizational structure is psychologically and ethically prepared to receive and act upon critical feedback, consequently suggesting that investing in leadership development and cultural alignment must precede, or at least run parallel to, the technical implementation of the SSE cycle, promising a significant theoretical refinement; furthermore, the study's practical contribution will manifest in the generation of a Culture-Readiness Index for SSE Implementation, a tool derived from the empirical findings that will allow Islamic educational leaders to assess their institution's cultural and leadership preparedness before investing resources in the SSE

process, thus providing a strategic, evidence-based roadmap for successful cultural transformation and ensuring the research delivers both profound intellectual depth and immediate administrative utility.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, grounded in the literature, to analyse the strategic role of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) in strengthening a sustainable quality culture in educational institutions. This design is appropriate because the study aims to synthesise theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and policy frameworks rather than collect primary data. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary instrument for selecting sources, interpreting information, and constructing analytical meaning.

The population of this research comprises academic works on internal quality assurance, sustainable quality culture, educational leadership, organisational behaviour, and School Self-Evaluation. A purposive sampling technique was used to select sources published between 2015 and 2024 that meet the following criteria: (1) relevance to SSE, (2) contribution to discussions on quality culture or quality assurance, (3) publication in reputable journals or books, and (4) conceptual or empirical significance. The final sample includes peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy documents, and authoritative reports.

Data were gathered through systematic literature review procedures, including identifying keywords, screening titles and abstracts, evaluating methodological rigor, and extracting essential concepts. Selected sources were organised according to their thematic relevance to the research objectives. Data collection followed a structured process to ensure objectivity, credibility, and traceability.

The study employed thematic analysis, beginning with initial coding of concepts related to SSE and quality culture. Axial coding was then used to identify relationships among themes such as leadership, organisational behaviour, continuous improvement, and decision-making. Finally, selective coding integrated the findings into a conceptual framework that explains how SSE contributes to the development of a sustainable quality culture in educational settings. This multi-stage analysis technique enables deep interpretation while maintaining analytical rigor.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The findings of this study are the result of a systematic qualitative analysis of academic literature, institutional documents, national standards, and policy reports related to School Self-Evaluation (SSE) and sustainable quality culture. Although the study did not collect primary field data, the analysed document sources, such as national quality assurance frameworks, school accreditation reports, and published case studies, provided rich evidence that allowed the researcher to derive clear, structured, and original insights. To ensure clarity, the findings are presented in a systematic table and a conceptual diagram, making it easy for readers to interpret the results.

SSE Enhances Data Accuracy and Quality Improvement Planning

The analysis reveals that SSE strengthens a school's internal capacity to produce accurate, measurable, and comprehensive performance data. Schools that regularly implement SSE can identify achievement gaps, prioritise problems, and design targeted action plans. This supports continuous improvement cycles and aligns school programs with quality standards.

SSE Strengthens Educational Leadership and Organisational Decision Making

The reviewed studies consistently show that SSE encourages data-informed leadership. School principals become more strategic in resource allocation, performance monitoring, and teacher development. Leaders who actively apply SSE principles demonstrate greater transparency, accountability, and collaborative decision-making.

SSE Contributes to Sustainable Quality Culture Formation

A significant thematic finding is that SSE fosters a school culture characterised by continuous improvement, reflection, shared responsibility, and consistent monitoring. This sustainable quality culture is strengthened by collaborative evaluation practices, teacher and stakeholder involvement, and regular feedback loops.

Barriers to Effective SSE Implementation

Despite its benefits, the findings identify recurring challenges: limited staff capacity, inadequate training on evaluation instruments, resistance to change, and weak follow-up implementation. These obstacles prevent schools from maximising SSE's transformative potential.

Table 1. Systematic Presentation of Key Findings

Main Theme	Detailed Findings	Implications for Schools	Supporting Sources
Data-Driven Improvement	SSE improves the accuracy of internal data, identifies gaps, and strengthens monitoring.	Schools design more targeted improvement programs aligned with standards.	Firdaus et al. (2024); Diana (2022)
Leadership and Decision Making	Encourages evidence-based leadership, enhances transparency, and supports collaborative planning.	Principals make more accountable and strategic decisions.	Barnawi & Arifin (2017); Baharun & Zamroni (2017)
Sustainable Quality Culture	Builds long-term habits of reflection, continuous improvement, and shared responsibility.	Schools develop a stronger organisational culture and teamwork.	Happyana (2024); Yunus & Rusli (2023)
Implementation Challenges	Lack of capacity, limited training, resistance to change, and weak follow-up actions.	Schools need training, policy support, and stronger internal supervision.	Warta et al. (2024); Firdaus et al. (2024)

The table is designed to help readers systematically identify the relationships among findings, implications, and literature support.



Figure 1: Conceptual Flow of SSE’s Contribution to Quality Culture

This conceptual visualisation clearly illustrates how SSE functions not merely as an evaluative tool but as a strategic driver of long-term quality enhancement.

Integrated Interpretation of Results

Collectively, the findings reveal that SSE provides a structural foundation for establishing quality-driven school management. The most substantial impact of SSE appears in its ability to improve leadership behavior and internal decision-making. A sustainable quality culture benefits most when SSE is implemented as a continuous, collaborative, and reflective practice rather than merely as an administrative requirement. The presence of various challenges further emphasises the need for capacity building and stronger policy support. Overall, these results indicate that SSE is most effective when it is embedded within a broader framework of leadership development, organisational behaviour strengthening, and ongoing professional learning.

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Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the strategic role of School Self-Evaluation (SSE) in strengthening a sustainable quality culture within educational institutions. The interpretation of these findings reveals several important theoretical and practical implications that align with, extend, and in some cases challenge previous literature.

The research findings robustly establish that School Self-Evaluation (SSE) functions as a fundamental mechanism for enhancing an institution's internal capacity to generate accurate, measurable, and comprehensive performance data (Anwar & Zuhdi, 2022). This improved data quality is critical because it moves quality assurance beyond mere compliance, enabling schools to precisely map student achievement gaps and diagnose specific systemic weaknesses (Purnomo et al., 2023), which, in turn, allows for the design of targeted, high-impact action plans rather than generic, scattergun initiatives. The immediate function, or "so-what," of accurate SSE data is the successful prioritisation of problems, ensuring that scarce resources whether financial or human are directed toward the most pressing areas of need (Sari & Hadi, 2021), thereby significantly increasing the efficiency and return on investment of the entire quality improvement cycle. The potential dysfunction of lacking accurate SSE data would be misallocation of resources, the propagation of ineffective programs, and, ultimately, a failure to address the actual root causes of underperformance. The underlying mechanism, or "why," for this enhanced data integrity is the mandatory, structured nature of the SSE process itself, which compels stakeholders to standardise data collection

protocols and consistently benchmark results against national or institutional standards. This structural necessity cultivates an organisational discipline that systematically strengthens monitoring activities and establishes a formal, recurrent feedback loop, transforming disparate facts into cohesive, actionable intelligence. The result is a decisive shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive, strategic quality planning, confirming SSE's role as the indispensable structural tool for data centralisation and validation.

A second crucial finding highlights SSE's direct role in professionalising school leadership and fostering a shift toward data-informed, highly strategic organisational decision-making (Supriyanto, 2024). The critical implication of this shift is greater transparency and accountability among school principals. When SSE findings guide resource allocation (e.g., funding a specific teacher training based on identified pedagogical gaps) and performance monitoring, the decisions become auditable, justifiable, and less susceptible to personal bias or political manoeuvring (Khoiriyah & Rofiuddin, 2023). This structural function of accountability the 'so-what' is vital for building and sustaining internal trust within the school community, thereby reducing conflict and increasing collective efficacy. Conversely, the absence of SSE data can lead to arbitrary or subjective leadership decisions, resulting in staff cynicism and organisational resistance (a key dysfunction). The positive correlation observed between active SSE application and collaborative planning indicates that leaders proactively seek input, moving away from autocratic models toward distributed leadership (Arifin & Widyawati, 2021), thereby maximising organisational buy-in (Wahid & Mutmainah, 2022). This change in leadership behaviour is rooted in the underlying structure of SSE, which institutionalises an external check on internal biases. The process mandates the public presentation of evaluation results, creating an inherent demand for leaders to justify their subsequent strategic choices with evidence. Therefore, the "why" is that SSE serves as an accountability mechanism that compels ethical, evidence-based practice, structurally transforming the principal's role from a mere administrator into a transparent, strategic, and data-driven manager who prioritises collective success over individual discretion.

The third and most significant long-term impact of SSE lies in its capacity to foster a self-sustaining quality culture characterised by continuous improvement, reflection, and shared responsibility (Hidayatullah, 2023). The formation of this culture represents the ultimate functional success of the SSE process: quality becomes an intrinsic organisational value rather than an externally imposed rule. When evaluation practices are collaborative and feature

regular feedback loops (Zainuddin & Mahmud, 2022), teachers and staff shift from viewing evaluation as punitive inspection (dysfunction) to recognising it as a shared professional learning opportunity (function). This shared ownership ensures the habits of reflection persist even outside the formal SSE cycle, embedding quality improvement into daily professional life and promoting proactive behaviour (Budianto & Santoso, 2021). This collaborative spirit, fueled by systematic stakeholder involvement, transforms improvement from a top-down mandate into a bottom-up, collective commitment, significantly enhancing the school's social capital and promoting robust teamwork. The "why" behind this cultural shift is the reciprocal relationship established by SSE between procedural compliance and psychological ownership (Ismail & Harahap, 2024). By consistently involving stakeholders in the evaluation and subsequent action planning, the SSE framework structurally validates their expertise and voice, creating an underlying sense of collective efficacy and shared destiny. This continuous process of involvement and validation transforms mere responsibility into genuine psychological ownership, ensuring that improvement activities are sustained indefinitely. Thus, SSE serves as the structural foundation that translates professional procedures into a permanent organisational habit and a deeply embedded cultural value.

Despite the clear and substantial benefits of SSE, the research consistently identifies recurring, systemic barriers to its effective and complete implementation, notably insufficient staff capacity, inadequate training, and organisational resistance to change (Wulandari & Sugiono, 2023). The practical implication of these obstacles the "so-what" is the prevention of SSE from reaching its full transformative potential, often reducing it to a ritualistic, administrative compliance exercise rather than a genuine driver for improvement (dysfunction). Lack of capacity and training means staff cannot accurately interpret evaluation instruments or use the resulting complex data (Nugroho et al., 2022), leading to superficial findings and poorly designed action plans, thereby wasting organisational time and effort. Furthermore, resistance to change, often driven by fear of accountability or an increased workload, actively undermines the collaborative ethos that SSE aims to cultivate, leading to implementation failure. The "why" for these persistent barriers lies in structural deficiencies at both the institutional and policy levels. The weak follow-up implementation suggests a lack of robust internal supervision and accountability mechanisms to bridge the gap between planning and execution (Yusuf & Rahman, 2024). More fundamentally, resistance to change indicates a pre-existing organisational structure in which risk-taking and constructive criticism

are not psychologically safe, often linked to weak ethical leadership that fails to cultivate trust. Therefore, the challenges underscore that the procedural requirements of SSE are necessary but insufficient; success is fundamentally predicated on pre-existing leadership development and policy support that prepare the organisation for the cultural demands of continuous, critical reflection.

The interconnectedness of the first three findings (Data Accuracy, Leadership, and Culture) reveals that SSE is not a linear, one-off process but a recursive system in which each positive outcome reinforces the others, creating powerful synergy (Abdullah & Nasir, 2023). The central function ("so-what") of this synergy is organizational resilience and self-correction (Fauzi & Lestari, 2024). For instance, improved data accuracy (Finding 1) directly supports the strategic, evidence-based leadership (Finding 2) identified by the research. When leaders possess reliable data, their decisions are perceived as more legitimate, which, in turn, boosts teacher and stakeholder trust. This increase in trust and perceived fairness is the essential foundation upon which collaborative behavior a key component of the Sustainable Quality Culture (Finding 3) is built. Conversely, a dysfunctional culture of mistrust will reject or ignore the accurate data, preventing leaders from acting upon it and breaking the cycle. This reinforcing loop is the core functional success of SSE: Accurate Data informs strategic Leadership, Strategic Leadership builds internal Trust, Trust enables a collaborative Quality Culture, and the Quality Culture protects the integrity of the Data. The underlying structure ("why") that sustains this synergy is the concept of mandatory transparency and shared governance that SSE implicitly or explicitly enforces. By mandating both accountability and participation, SSE creates a systemic environment where critical feedback is welcomed as a contribution rather than feared as a threat. The actual effectiveness of SSE lies not in the evaluation reports themselves, but in its structural ability to align data, behaviour, and organisational values toward a singular goal of excellence.

This research significantly contributes to organisational quality assurance theory by successfully reframing SSE from a mere compliance tool into a strategic driver of cultural transformation, directly addressing the critical research gap identified in the literature review. Prior scholarship often treated quality culture as a vague outcome or a secondary mediator. This study, by identifying a strong, reciprocal link among SSE, the shift towards data-informed and ethical leadership, and shared organisational behaviour, posits that the maturity of the quality culture is the necessary precursor to SSE's success, functioning as the primary moderating variable (Jaelani & Rohman, 2021). The key theoretical

implication is that models of quality management, particularly in value-driven, non-Western contexts, must shift their focus from technocratic procedural adherence to socio-cultural and ethical readiness. The study validates the concept that for continuous improvement to be truly sustainable, it must be internalised through leadership practices aligned with ethical mandates (Kurniawan & Dewi, 2022) (such as *ihsan* or *amanah* in Islamic education), moving beyond secular, performance-only metrics. Consequently, the findings necessitate the development of a new, integrated theoretical framework that centres leadership efficacy and cultural maturity within the SSE cycle. This new model suggests that the intervention point for failed quality systems is not the evaluation instrument itself, but the organizational preparedness to receive, reflect upon, and act ethically on the feedback, ultimately redefining SSE as a powerful socio-ethical intervention rather than solely an administrative one.

The research findings offer concrete, actionable guidance for educational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to maximize the transformative impact of SSE within their institutions. In practice, schools must prioritise investment in capacity-building programs that go beyond merely explaining the evaluation instruments; training should focus specifically on data analysis, interpretation, and collaborative action planning skills to overcome the 'implementation barriers' (Finding 4). For leadership, the implication is a mandate to institutionalise transparency by creating formal mechanisms for sharing SSE results and publicly justifying resource allocation decisions, thereby boosting internal trust and accountability (Finding 2). Furthermore, given the challenges, school leaders must act as cultural architects, actively promoting psychological safety to foster a climate that encourages critical self-reflection (Finding 3). Policymakers should focus on developing standardised "Culture-Readiness" or "Leadership Efficacy" assessments that schools must complete before a full SSE implementation, ensuring the required organisational maturity is in place to prevent the administrative burden from becoming a primary dysfunction. Ultimately, the practical translation of this research is precise: SSE must be managed as a cultural intervention, not a bureaucratic chore. Success requires a deliberate, simultaneous strategy that addresses procedural completeness (the SSE cycle), behavioural commitment (ethical leadership), and cultural acceptance (shared responsibility), ensuring that the tool is fully embedded and utilised as the strategic driver for long-term excellence.

Overall, the discussion reveals that SSE is a powerful mechanism for institutional change when implemented systematically and supported by organisational leadership. It not only strengthens the technical aspects of quality

assurance but also fosters a sustainable quality culture that aligns with the long-term goals of Islamic education. This study contributes a deeper theoretical understanding of how SSE functions as both an evaluative and a cultural instrument, paving the way for future research to refine this conceptual framework.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that School Self-Evaluation (SSE) is a strategic mechanism for strengthening a sustainable quality culture in educational institutions. The findings show that SSE enhances the accuracy of institutional data, supports evidence-based leadership, and fosters continuous improvement practices that strengthen organisational culture. These results reinforce existing theories of quality assurance and organisational behaviour while offering an integrative perspective on how evaluation, leadership, and culture interact to promote long-term educational quality. The study contributes to the field by positioning SSE not only as an assessment tool but also as a cultural catalyst that shapes institutional routines and shared responsibility. Practically, schools are encouraged to embed SSE into ongoing management processes, strengthen stakeholder participation, and ensure consistent follow-up actions to maximise its impact.

However, the research is limited by its reliance on secondary data, which restricts broad generalisation. Future research should incorporate empirical field studies, comparative analyses, and longitudinal approaches to explore how SSE operates in diverse contexts and its direct influence on teacher performance and student learning outcomes. SSE holds significant potential as a driver of sustainable quality development, and further empirical investigation is essential to deepen understanding and enhance its implementation in educational practice.

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