

Beyond Technocratic Quality Assurance: Humanizing Digital Governance through South Sumatran Ethnopedagogy

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Abstract

Digital governance has become a fundamental component of quality assurance in higher education within the era of Quality 4.0. However, its implementation frequently emphasizes administrative compliance and data-driven performance indicators, thereby diminishing the humanistic dimension of quality assurance, particularly in Islamic higher education institutions. This study aims to reconstruct a humanistic digital quality governance framework at Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University (UQI) Indralaya through the integration of the ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra and pesantren spirituality. The study employed a qualitative approach using a conceptual-philosophical design based on library research. Data were analyzed interpretively through a review of the literature on digital governance, Quality 4.0, ethnopedagogy, Simbur Cahaya, and pesantren values. The findings indicate that the PPEPP cycle can be reconstructed by integrating Simbur Cahaya as the ethical foundation of quality assurance, Saling Setiti as the professional ethic guiding quality management, and Saling Setuhu as the basis for dialogic and collaborative evaluation. The novelty of this study lies in the development of a conceptual framework that integrates the ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra and pesantren spirituality into digital quality governance. These findings provide implications for the development of more contextual, humanistic, and locally grounded policies for the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and higher education accreditation.

Tata kelola digital menjadi fondasi penting penjaminan mutu pendidikan tinggi pada era Quality 4.0, tetapi implementasinya sering berorientasi pada kepatuhan administratif dan indikator berbasis data sehingga mengurangi dimensi humanistik, terutama di perguruan tinggi keagamaan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi kerangka tata kelola mutu digital yang humanistik di Universitas Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an (UQI) Indralaya melalui integrasi nilai etnopedagogi Sumatera Selatan dan spiritualitas pesantren. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain konseptual-filosofis berbasis studi kepustakaan. Data dianalisis secara interpretatif melalui telaah literatur mengenai tata kelola digital, Quality 4.0, etnopedagogi, Simbur Cahaya, dan nilai-nilai pesantren. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siklus PPEPP dapat direkonstruksi melalui integrasi Simbur Cahaya sebagai landasan etis penjaminan mutu, Saling Setiti sebagai etika profesional dalam pengelolaan mutu, dan Saling Setuhu sebagai dasar evaluasi yang dialogis dan kolaboratif. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada pengembangan kerangka konseptual yang mengintegrasikan etnopedagogi Sumatera

Selatan dan spiritualitas pesantren ke dalam tata kelola mutu digital. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi bagi pengembangan kebijakan SPMI dan akreditasi yang lebih kontekstual, humanistik, dan berbasis nilai lokal.

A. INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of Industrial Revolution 4.0 has thrust the Indonesian education system into an increasingly complex landscape of disruption, affecting not only pedagogical practices but also the fundamental structure of organizational governance. In recent developments, quality assurance can no longer be understood merely as an attempt to maintain institutional standards; rather, it has evolved into an process of establishing a data-driven quality ecosystem supported by Big Data, artificial intelligence, and predictive analytics capable of identifying potential quality failures before they actually occur (Abnoulgid et al., 2025; Benavides et al., 2020). Within this context, Quality 4.0 has emerged as an extension of the quality management paradigm that aligns the principles of quality management with the capabilities of digital technology, ranging from data integration and process automation to the implementation of evidence-based decision-making (Dias et al., 2022; Sony et al., 2020).

Digital governance is no longer an optional strategy but has become a structural necessity for higher education institutions seeking to maintain efficiency, accountability, and compliance with national quality standards. Digital transformation is frequently presented as a strategic solution that enables the positivist-technocratic dimensions of quality management to operate in more measurable and well-documented ways (Benavides et al., 2020; Poszytek, 2024). In Indonesia, this requirement is further reinforced by the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 53 of 2023 on Higher Education Quality Assurance, which requires all higher education institutions to implement in the cycle of Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, and Improvement (PPEPP) of quality standards consistently and continuously (Permendikbudristek, 2023). Accordingly, the implementation of ISO standards, BAN-PT/LAM accreditation indicators, and institutional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be managed more effectively through the PPEPP cycle, enabling Industry 4.0 technologies to automate many procedural compliance functions while allowing institutions to allocate greater organizational capacity to more substantive innovation.

Nevertheless, the promise of technological efficiency begun to reveal its empirical limitations over the past five years. Recent studies indicate that intensive dependence on digital information systems generates technostress, which has become a significant predictor of burnout, declining organizational commitment, and reduced teaching performance in higher education institutions (Tu et al., 2025), reinforcing earlier findings on role overload and emotional exhaustion resulting caused by continuous technological demands (Ayyagari et al., 2011; Tarafdar et al., 2007). At the same time, systematic reviews of artificial intelligence applications in higher education have called for greater attention to ethics, collaboration, and methodological rigor while highlighting the risks of algorithmic bias and inequality associated with data-driven systems (Bond et al., 2024). These findings confirm that digital data are never entirely neutral, as they inevitably embody particular logics of classification, surveillance, and specific ways of interpreting human behavior and educational institutions (Selwyn, 2022; Williamson, 2018). In other words, the reduction of quality to administrative compliance is no longer merely a theoretical concern but an empirically documented phenomenon.

This gap forms the point of departure for the present study. Ideally, the digitalization of quality governance should release institutional capacity for substantive improvement and the humanization of the academic community. In reality, however, when digitalization is reduced to converting physical documents into digital formats, numerical indicators, performance statistics, and procedural compliance, higher education institutions risk becoming trapped in rigid and impersonal forms of technocracy. This gap is particularly pronounced in Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) such as Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University (UQI) Indralaya. Bearing the name "Al-Qur'an" and rooted in the pesantren tradition, the institution carries the moral responsibility of producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also shaped by the internalization of Qur'anic values, *khidmah* (devotional service), *uswah hasanah* (moral exemplarity), and *ikhlas* (sincerity). When digital systems are implemented without sensitivity to socio-cultural contexts, they may alienate educational actors from their own human experiences (Selwyn, 2022; Williamson, 2018), giving rise to cultural alienation among lecturers and educational staff who become trapped in administrative burnout while pursuing formal quality compliance (Komsiyah, 2021).

This gap does not emerge without cause. At least three underlying factors can be identified. First, the adoption of technology in a linear and uncritical manner has caused digitalization to serve merely as an administrative blueprint for satisfying procedural regulations, positioning quality as a formalistic obligation rather than a substantive force for shaping academic culture. Second, the dominance of the logic of datafication and surveillance transforms ethical relationships into control when technological monitoring becomes excessive (Zuboff, 2019). Third, the absence of local and spiritual value frameworks in the design of quality assurance systems renders such systems "context-blind." Studies on Islamic educational institutions have shown that the tension between modernity and tradition constitutes a genuine challenge requiring continuous negotiation (Misdah et al., 2025), and that efforts to integrate the values of the pesantren tradition into digital systems face fundamental challenges in balancing digital efficiency with humanistic values (Manaf et al., 2026).

To situate the contribution of the present study, it is important to review several relevant previous studies. First, Manaf et al. (2026) examined digital leadership rooted in the pesantren tradition at Darunnajah Islamic Boarding School and found that the values of Panca Jiwa were systematically integrated into digital systems such as the E-Report and smart systems. This study shares similarities with the present research in integrating pesantren values into digital governance; however, it differs in that it focuses on leadership at the pesantren level and is based on the Panca Jiwa values rather than higher education quality assurance through the PPEPP cycle or ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra. Second, Misdah et al. (2025) investigated the strategic practices of Islamic schools in navigating modernity and tradition in border regions. While their study similarly addresses the negotiation between Islamic values and the demands of modernity, it is limited to general institutional strategies and does not address the reconstruction of digital quality assurance based on specific local wisdom. Third, Mzimela & Moyo (2026), from a decolonial perspective, argued that higher education quality assurance should move beyond procedural compliance with imported quality models and embrace epistemic plurality, including indigenous knowledge systems. Although their study shares a similar commitment to critiquing technocratic approaches to quality assurance and promoting local knowledge, it is situated within the South African decolonial context and does not specifically connect its discussion to Quality 4.0, digitalization, or pesantren spirituality.

Based on this review, it is evident that previous studies have (a) integrated pesantren values into digital leadership, (b) examined the negotiation between Islamic values and modernity at the institutional level, and (c) advocated quality assurance grounded in indigenous knowledge within a decolonial framework. Nevertheless, no study has explicitly reconstructed the PPEPP cycle within a digital quality assurance system by positioning the ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra, namely Simbur Cahaya, Saling Setiti, and Saling Setuhu, integrated with pesantren spirituality as an ethical foundation. This constitutes the novelty of the present study: digital governance is not rejected but reconstructed so that quality technologies operate alongside local wisdom and institutional spirituality, enabling the modernization of governance to remain grounded in human dignity, cultural identity, and the values of the pesantren tradition.

In response to these issues, a philosophical deconstruction of the meaning of "quality" within digital governance systems is required, carried out through an ethnopedagogical intervention as an effort to humanize institutional quality governance. The ethnopedagogical approach argues that educational management practices should not be detached from the local values of the communities in which institutions are situated; instead, local wisdom should be integrated into institutional practices (Sugara & Sugito, 2022). Internationally, this perspective resonates with culturally responsive pedagogy, which positions culture, social experience, and communal identity as essential foundations of meaningful education (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), and is also aligned with place-conscious education, which emphasizes that place, historical memory, and social relationships constitute pedagogical spaces that shape institutional awareness and responsibility (Gruenewald, 2003). Within this framework, South Sumatra, particularly the Ogan Ilir region, possesses a rich philosophical heritage that can be employed to reconstruct the quality assurance framework in a more humanistic orientation.

As an analytical lens, the classical customary legal tradition of Simbur Cahaya, formulated by Ratu Sinuhun, should not be understood merely as a punitive legal codification but rather as a moral framework for preserving dignity, social order, and harmony within communal life (Yusdani, 2004). Several studies have shown that the philosophy of Simbur Cahaya continues to be preserved in the Uluan regions, including Palembang, Ogan Ilir, Ogan Komering Ilir, and Ogan Komering Ulu, because this customary system embodies moral, political, and social values that are consistent with

Qur'anic and prophetic teachings (Husna et al., 2019; Muhammad, 2014). In the context of quality assurance, this philosophy implies that the formulation of quality standards and quality audits should not be designed as surveillance mechanisms intended to expose institutional failures, echoing critiques of the digital surveillance society, which warn that excessive technological monitoring may transform ethical relationships into relationships of control (Zuboff, 2019). Rather, they should be positioned as a form of academic customary law collectively upheld to preserve institutional dignity and sustainability through harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Another analytical perspective for strengthening the humanization of quality culture is derived from the ethos of the Ogan Ilir community, namely *Saling Setiti* and *Saling Setuhu*, both of which are embedded in the *Simbur Cahaya* tradition and reflected in ethnographic studies of local cultural value systems (Yusnita, 2022). *Setiti*, which refers to carefulness, precision, and concern for others, represents the cognitive and professional dimensions of quality assurance, manifested in data accuracy, analytical rigor, and orderly and responsible digital document management as an expression of *itqan*. Meanwhile, *Setuhu*, which embodies the values of agreement, solidarity, and mutual support, represents the social dimension of quality assurance (Samudro, 2018). It emphasizes deliberation, egalitarian relationships, and the spirit of mutual cooperation rooted in the *pesantren* tradition and conceptualized in Islamic thought as *ukhuwah*. Since human factors, organizational culture, and leadership are recognized as fundamental prerequisites for ensuring that quality technologies function as more than digital instruments (Dias et al., 2022; Sony et al., 2020), *Setuhu* can be implemented through dialogic approaches to quality evaluation and quality control that avoid excessive reliance on numerical indicators.

Through the philosophical integration of *Simbur Cahaya* with the ethos of *Saling Setiti* and *Saling Setuhu*, a digital governance-based quality assurance framework can be established on a more balanced and sustainable foundation. These customary values and local work ethics challenge the assumption that Digital Quality Assurance 4.0 is merely a rigid, impersonal administrative blueprint and instead transforming it into a living institutional framework in which ethical and cultural values are internalized as organizational culture. Accordingly, quality assurance at UQI Indralaya is no longer reduced to static numerical indicators displayed on digital reporting dashboards but is reconstructed as a digital ecosystem that integrates the precision of

modern governance (Setiti) with social harmony, moral character, and communal values rooted in the pesantren tradition through the spirit of ukhuwah (Setuhu).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to reconstruct a humanistic framework for digital quality governance at Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University (UQI) Indralaya by integrating the ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra and pesantren spirituality into the institutional quality assurance system. To maintain a clear focus, the study is limited to four aspects. First, methodologically, it is conceptual and philosophical in nature and is not intended to produce empirical generalizations. Second, the object of the study is limited to UQI Indralaya as a representative of pesantren-based Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS). Third, the reconstruction focuses on the PPEPP cycle rather than the entire quality assurance system. Fourth, the ethnopedagogical values examined are limited to Simbur Cahaya, Saling Setiti, and Saling Setuhu. Within these boundaries, the study is positioned as an initial conceptual framework that may serve as a foundation for expert validation, case studies, and future field investigations.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a conceptual-philosophical research design based on library research (Assaad et al., 2022; Jaakkola, 2020). This design was adopted to formulate an initial conceptual framework for the humanization of digital governance within the quality assurance system of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS), using Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University (UQI) Indralaya as a representative case. The outcome of the study is positioned as a conceptual framework rather than an empirical generalization (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2005). The study employed a qualitative interpretive-critical approach, which was used to interpret and critically examine digital quality governance practices and subsequently reconstruct them through the ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra (Simbur Cahaya, Saling Setiti, and Saling Setuhu) and pesantren spirituality.

The study applied a library research method combined with document analysis. Document analysis was selected because documents provide a systematic source of data for understanding institutional policies, organizational direction, and the socio-cultural meanings underlying educational practices (Bowen, 2009; Snyder, 2019). The primary research instrument was the researcher as the human instrument, supported

by a document analysis guide and a thematic coding matrix to organize, classify, and categorize data derived from both the literature and the documents under review.

Data were collected through a systematic search and review of literature and documents using the close reading technique. The data sources comprised three categories: (1) scholarly literature on digital governance, Quality 4.0, quality assurance, the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI), and the PPEPP cycle; (2) institutional and regulatory documents, including institutional development plans, SPMI guidelines, BAN-PT/LAM accreditation standards, and national quality assurance regulations; and (3) ethnopedagogical literature on South Sumatra concerning Simbur Cahaya, Saling Setiti, Saling Setuhu, and pesantren values such as khidmah, amanah, itqan, and ukhuwah. For empirical references, priority was given to publications from the last five years (2021–2026) indexed in Scopus or Web of Science.

Data were analyzed using an integrative-deconstructive approach consisting of three stages. First, the study identified technocratic tendencies in digital quality governance, particularly where quality is reduced to compliance with data, documents, and performance indicators. Second, it reinterpreted the values of Simbur Cahaya, Saling Setiti, Saling Setuhu, and the pesantren tradition as ethical foundations for humanizing the PPEPP cycle. Third, it synthesized these interpretations into a conceptual reconstruction model of the PPEPP cycle that integrates digital efficiency, local wisdom, and pesantren spirituality (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2005).

Data credibility was ensured through source triangulation by comparing academic literature, institutional and regulatory documents, and ethnopedagogical literature to avoid reliance on a single type of data source. Credibility was further strengthened through referential adequacy by prioritizing primary and up-to-date sources, as well as through peer debriefing involving discussions with experts in Islamic educational management. Since this study is conceptual in nature, logical coherence and argumentative consistency among the conceptual constructs served as the primary criteria for establishing validity.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. A Critical Review of the Rigidity of Quality 4.0

The implementation of digital transformation in higher education has generated significant institutional benefits by shifting from labor-intensive manual reporting to systems that are more efficient, measurable, transparent, and capable of

providing real-time data (Abnoulgid et al., 2025). Within the international scholarly discourse, digital transformation is understood not merely as the adoption of technological tools but as a strategic process of change that integrates technology, organizational structures, work culture, and the creation of new institutional value (Verhoef et al., 2021).

In the context of higher education, digitalization is likewise understood as a systemic transformation that influences governance, academic services, data management, and institutional quality assurance practices, as reflected in data-driven management strategies implemented in Islamic higher education institutions (Haddade et al., 2024). In discussions of Total Quality Management (TQM) in educational institutions, technology has increasingly transformed administrative workloads into intelligent automation systems, enabling Industry 4.0 technologies to eliminate the "compliance trap" commonly associated with management standards and redirect organizational orientation toward strategic, data-driven improvement (Abnoulgid et al., 2025). Through digital technologies and integrated data synchronization, key indicators such as graduation rates, student satisfaction, learning effectiveness, and the performance of the Tridharma of Higher Education can be generated automatically and in real time (Prabowo & Bandur, 2022).

Within the Quality 4.0 literature, the integration of big data, artificial intelligence, automation, and digital connectivity is widely regarded as expanding the scope of quality management beyond documentation to predictive and preventive functions (Abnoulgid et al., 2025). The Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) has become increasingly integrated into digital dashboards that regulate academic activities, ranging from institutional planning and faculty evaluation to the automated reporting of the Tridharma of Higher Education. Under this arrangement, institutions no longer function merely as administrative regulators but as digital nervous systems that monitor day-to-day academic activities within data-driven educational organizations (Alfarisi, 2026). For institutions such as Universitas Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an (UQI) Indralaya, which recently underwent institutional transformation, the adoption of technology has become a structural necessity for complying with national quality assurance regulations and the accreditation standards established by BAN-PT/LAM.

Ironically, digital governance is often adopted in a linear and uncritical manner. As a result, digitalization frequently functions as a rigid administrative blueprint designed to satisfy procedural regulations. Educational institutions ultimately position

quality as a formalistic obligation rather than a substantive force shaping academic culture. Classical discussions of higher education quality, however, emphasize that quality cannot be reduced solely to procedural conformity, as it also encompasses values, transformation, relevance, and meaningful academic experiences (Harvey & Green, 1993). When digital dashboards become the sole language through which quality is interpreted, institutions tend to privilege numbers and statistics while marginalizing values, social relationships, and institutional culture from a broader understanding of educational quality.

Critiques of the datafication of education further demonstrate that excessive digital measurement shifts attention away from the lived educational process to a performative logic governed by indicators and metrics (Fawns et al., 2021; Gourlay, 2024). Institutional local contexts also risk being overlooked when digital systems fail to provide space for the integration of values, cultural flexibility, and meaningful human participation. From the perspective of quality culture, the success of quality assurance depends not only on instruments and procedures but also on shared meaning, collective commitment, and the lived organizational values that sustain the institution (Ehlers, 2009; Musgamy et al., 2026).

2. Unpacking the Risks of Bureaucratic Dehumanization and Cultural Alienation in Higher Education

Building upon critiques of the technocratic orientation of Quality 4.0 digital quality assurance, this study adopts a deconstructive perspective to highlight the potential shift, or even reduction, in the fundamental meaning of "quality" in education. A quality assurance system that focuses exclusively on fulfilling quantitative performance indicators may generate administrative burnout while simultaneously erasing the qualitative and philosophical dimensions of educational values. This phenomenon resonates with international critiques of audit culture and performativity, in which educational institutions are compelled to define themselves through indicators, rankings, performance scores, and repetitive verification procedures (Ball, 2003; Power, 1997). Institutional educational quality is no longer assessed through the capacity of the learning process to cultivate character, morality, personal development, and meaningful lecturer–student relationships, but rather through technical-administrative calculations, numerical indicators, mathematical ratios, and the timely submission of documents. At this point, digital data cease to

function as a reflective tool and instead become a singular regime of truth that disciplines academic behavior (Gourlay, 2024; Musgamy et al., 2026)

Such conditions give rise to the risk of bureaucratic dehumanization within educational institutions. Lecturers and quality assurance personnel, including institutional quality assurance units, may gradually be positioned as "servants of the digital system," with responsibilities reduced to meeting administrative requirements. In fact, lecturers should serve as visionary agents responsible for internalizing educational values, acting as agents of transformation, developing students' intellectual capacities, fostering ethical awareness and social responsibility, and shaping their human character. When lecturers experience excessive administrative burnout, various forms of cultural alienation are likely to emerge.

In the information systems literature, the pressures arising from continuous technological dependence, accelerated work demands, system complexity, and the burden of digital adaptation are commonly conceptualized as technostress. Recent empirical evidence confirms that technostress is a significant predictor of burnout, reduced organizational commitment, and declining academic staff performance (Tu et al., 2025), alongside growing calls for data-driven technologies in higher education to place greater emphasis on ethical considerations and the risks of algorithmic bias (Bond et al., 2024). Within the higher education context, these pressures may leave lecturers preoccupied with administrative compliance while depriving them of opportunities to develop pedagogical innovation, pursue intellectual growth, engage in critical reflection, sustain meaningful dialogue with students, and fulfill the moral and educational responsibilities of the Tridharma of Higher Education.

Universitas Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an (UQI) Indralaya, which has developed within the pesantren tradition, faces the possibility of cultural alienation that directly contradicts the spiritual foundations upon which the institution was established. Ontologically, pesantren-based educational institutions are rooted in the ethics of professionalism (*itqan*) and accountability (*amanah*), while emphasizing sincere service (*khidmah*), close emotional relationships between teachers and students as sources of spiritual blessing and moral authority within pesantren culture, and moral exemplarity (*uswah hasanah*) in educational practice (Wahidi & Syahidin, 2024). Within the scholarship of Islamic education, education is directed not only toward the transmission of knowledge but also toward the cultivation of *adab*, moral orientation, social responsibility, and holistic human integrity (Sahin, 2018). Related studies have

emphasized that, amid the dominance of formalistic approaches, Islamic education should adopt an integrative model that prioritizes holistic character formation beyond mere cognitive achievement (Supriatin et al., 2025). Studies of the pesantren tradition in Indonesia further demonstrate that Islamic educational institutions are capable of integrating institutional modernity with the continuity of religious and cultural values, though this requires continuous negotiation between modernity and tradition (Manaf et al., 2026; Misdah et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, digital Quality 4.0 risks reducing the value of *khidmah* to a merely transactional relationship measured through performance data and numerical indicators. The verification of formal documents in both internal and external quality audits frequently overlooks the lived realities of sincerity, social relationships, organizational culture, and the actual social conditions experienced in educational practice. If digital governance systems continue to be adopted rigidly and uncritically without integrating humanistic values, the distinctive identity of UQI Indralaya as a pesantren- and Qur'an-based institution grounded in spirituality, *hablum minan nas*, and moral excellence may gradually erode within a purely technocratic digital system.

3. The Epistemology of South Sumatran Ethnopedagogy: The Philosophy of *Simbur Cahaya* and the Ethos of *Saling Setiti* and *Saling Setuhu* within the Context of Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University

The existential challenges posed by digital Quality 4.0 and the deadlock of technocratic university bureaucracy call for a deconstruction quality assurance governance through an ethnopedagogical approach. Quality assurance systems should not be adopted in a sterile and uncritical manner detached from values; rather, they should be developed within the pesantren context from which the institution itself emerged and evolved. Within the international educational literature, this perspective aligns with culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally responsive teaching, and place-conscious education, all of which emphasize that meaningful educational practices must remain rooted in the experiences, languages, histories, and cultures of their communities (Gay, 2018; Gruenewald, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Decolonial and Indigenous educational perspectives likewise argue that local knowledge is not merely a cultural ornament but a legitimate epistemological source for developing educational practices that are equitable, relevant, and emancipatory (Paris & Alim, 2017; Smith, 2012). This position is further reinforced by recent studies demonstrating the effectiveness of ethnopedagogy in revitalizing local wisdom and fostering character

development (Ibnu & Tahar, 2021; Sakti et al., 2024), as well as by the growing demand for quality assurance systems that embrace Indigenous knowledge beyond procedural compliance (Mzimela & Moyo, 2026). Within the context of Universitas Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an (UQI) Indralaya, which is rooted in the cultural landscape of Ogan Ilir, South Sumatra, this reconstruction finds a harmonious epistemological foundation through the integration of the classical customary legal tradition of Simbur Cahaya with the socio-cultural ethos of Saling Setiti and Saling Setuhu, values that continue to be preserved within the communal traditions of South Sumatra.

The customary code of Simbur Cahaya, formulated by Ratu Sinuhun as the earliest codification of Malay-Islamic customary law in South Sumatra, should not be understood merely as a legal framework for punishing individuals who violate customary norms. Ontologically, it functions as a moral guide for maintaining social balance, communal harmony, and healthy interpersonal relationships within society (Yusnita, 2022). In practice, Simbur Cahaya customary law is oriented not solely toward punishment but also toward guidance, conflict resolution, and the restoration of social relationships (Yusdani, 2004). Within the international scholarly discourse, this orientation closely resembles the principles of restorative justice, which interpret violations not simply as individual wrongdoing but as disruptions to social relationships that should be repaired through dialogue, accountability, and communal reintegration (Braithwaite, 1989; Zehr, 2002). In this sense, Simbur Cahaya may be understood as an ethical foundation viewing social order not as a form of repression but as a social mechanism for preserving collective dignity and social cohesion.

From the perspective of educational management philosophy, Simbur Cahaya offers a new lens through which to understand the regulatory framework of quality governance in higher education. The paradigm embedded in application-based Internal Quality Assurance Systems (SPMI) often functions merely as a mechanism of administrative policing, that is, a surveillance instrument centered on formal judgments of compliance and non-compliance through bureaucratic ranking systems. Consequently, quality assurance procedures are frequently perceived as threats to the professional existence of lecturers and educational staff whenever administrative requirements are not fully satisfied. However, within the discourse of quality culture, a healthy quality assurance system is built not only through mechanisms of control but also through shared values, trust, participation, responsibility, and organizational learning (Ehlers, 2009; Musgamy et al., 2026). As an internalization of the

philosophical values of Simbur Cahaya, quality standards should therefore be positioned as a form of "academic customary law" established through legitimate and respected institutional consensus. Such academic customary law is upheld as a collective ethical commitment developed through dialogue among stakeholders and the academic community to safeguard the existence, dignity, and institutional honor of UQI, which is fundamentally rooted in Qur'anic and pesantren values.

The philosophical foundation of Simbur Cahaya as a dimension of quality assurance bureaucracy is further reinforced through the internalization of the socio-cultural ethos of the Pegagan community in Ogan Ilir, namely Saling Setiti and Saling Setuhu. This work ethic offers a balanced framework by integrating the intellectual, professional, and relational dimensions of educational quality management. Setiti represents attentiveness, precision, and conscientiousness in action grounded in accurate real-time data.

Within the context of digital Quality 4.0, this principle is reflected in accurate reporting, administrative discipline, and compliance with digital quality assurance standards. Studies on data quality emphasize that reliable data must satisfy the dimensions of accuracy, completeness, consistency, timeliness, and relevance in order to support organizational decision-making (Pipino et al., 2002). At UQI Indralaya, the attentiveness and precision embodied in Setiti acquire a sacred spiritual dimension when integrated with the Islamic principle of itqan, understood as professionalism grounded in devotional responsibility. Consequently, completing digital quality assurance instruments is no longer perceived merely as a source of administrative burnout but rather as a conscientious moral responsibility (Setiti) associated with institutional amanah and educational service.

Professionalism as a form of moral responsibility is further strengthened through the principle of Setuhu, which cultivates solidarity, justice-oriented commitment, loyalty, togetherness, collective orientation, and egalitarianism. This work ethic opposes individualistic competition, authoritarian top-down leadership, and position-oriented rivalry that relies solely on numerical indicators and performance data while neglecting dialogue within academic communities. The concept of Setuhu directs digital technology to function as a dialogical and communal space for communication among institutional members, representing the spiritual essence of ukhuwah within the pesantren tradition. Organizational learning theory likewise maintains that healthy institutions do not merely collect data but also

cultivate spaces for reflection, dialogue, and collective learning (Edmondson, 1999; Senge, 1990). Accordingly, evaluation processes should be transformed from interrogative threats to professional existence into dialogical and culturally grounded spaces for reflection, where stakeholders, educators, and educational staff collaboratively seek solutions through *musyawarah* (deliberative consultation), which may then be adopted as collectively respected academic norms.

Through this philosophical integration, the ethnopedagogy of South Sumatran society offers a compelling counterpoint to the dehumanization of digital Quality 4.0 governance. At UQI Indralaya, quality is reinterpreted not as blind compliance with numerical indicators and digital dashboards but as the institutional capacity to internalize harmonious organizational order through *Simbur Cahaya*, implement meticulous and professional work practices through *Setiti*, and sustain collective commitment and communal solidarity through *Setuhu* as hallmarks of *pesantren* culture, consistent with findings that local culture functions as a means of empowering students' character development (Ramadhana et al., 2023).

Accordingly, digital governance is not rejected but rather reoriented to function as an instrument for strengthening quality culture rather than as a bureaucratic machine that alienates people from their values, communities, and institutional identity. This framework is consistent with the view that a quality culture requires a balance between formal systems, organizational values, and the active participation of the people who bring those systems to life.

4. Model Synthesis: Reconstructing a Humanistic and Islamic-Oriented PPEPP Quality Cycle at Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University Indralaya

This critical examination of the philosophy of digital governance is not intended to dismantle the digital governance practices currently implemented at UQI Indralaya. Rather, this study proposes a conceptual reconstruction of the existing digital system as an effort to internalize spiritual values, local wisdom, and the ethos of the *pesantren* tradition into the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI), which continues to operate in a relatively rigid and impersonal manner. Accordingly, the proposed reconstruction should not be interpreted as an anti-technology movement but rather as an attempt to reposition technology within the broader horizon of humanity, culture, and institutional spirituality. Studies on digital transformation have consistently shown that the success of digitalization depends largely on an

organization's ability to integrate technology with strategy, organizational structure, human resources, and institutional values (Verhoef et al., 2021).

In accordance with the Indonesian government's regulation stipulated in the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (Permendiktisaintek) No. 39 of 2025, which encourages higher education institutions to digitalize their educational quality governance systems, quality assurance is implemented through the PPEPP cycle: Establishment (Penetapan), Implementation (Pelaksanaan), Evaluation (Evaluasi), Control (Pengendalian), and Continuous Improvement (Peningkatan). In the Quality 4.0 era, this cycle is commonly implemented through a mechanistic approach centered on performance indicators and digital applications. Such a cycle closely resembles the principle of continuous improvement in the quality management tradition, particularly the notion that quality should be developed through iterative, data-driven, and continuously refined processes (Deming, 2000; Sallis, 2002). However, when viewed through the lens of South Sumatran ethnopedagogy, the PPEPP framework can be transformed into a quality governance model that remains precise while becoming more humanistic and spiritually grounded. In this way, technology not only accelerates administrative processes but also deepens ethical awareness and institutional quality culture.

The first stage of the reconstruction begins with the establishment of internal quality standards grounded in the philosophy of customary order as a contextualization of the values embodied in Simbur Cahaya. Within this philosophical framework, quality standards are reconstructed as a form of "academic customary law" rather than merely as instruments of surveillance. This academic customary law is formulated through collective deliberation involving lecturers, faculty leaders, educational staff, and the governing board of the pesantren foundation to develop quality assurance regulations that are aligned with global standards while remaining firmly rooted in pesantren values and institutional service. Such a participatory approach to quality standardization is essential because quality systems imposed solely through top-down mechanisms often fail to cultivate a sense of institutional ownership, whereas a quality culture requires collective engagement and mutual trust among institutional actors (Ehlers, 2009; Huda et al., 2025; Sudirman et al., 2025). Consequently, uploading institutional documents to digital dashboards is no longer perceived as administrative burnout but rather as a collective commitment to safeguarding institutional sustainability while upholding the dignity of pesantren-

based local wisdom, just as Simbur Cahaya was originally formulated by Ratu Sinuhun to preserve harmony in the Uluan community of South Sumatra.

During the implementation stage, lecturers and educational staff interact directly with the digital governance system. The quantitative workload associated with this stage has the potential to generate cultural alienation among institutional members. As a constructive response, the ethos of Setiti is internalized into the institutional organizational culture so that activities such as document uploading, reporting, academic documentation, Tridharma administration, student data management, and other administrative responsibilities are understood as expressions of both individual and collective ethical consciousness. These activities are therefore interpreted not merely as technical obligations but as spiritual doctrines and moral responsibilities framed by the principle of itqan (professionalism). Within the quality management discourse, process quality cannot be separated from work discipline, data validity, and consistently maintained continuous improvement (Deming, 2000; Pipino et al., 2002; Widana et al., 2023). From this perspective, itqan is manifested through meticulous, professional, orderly, and data-driven work practices understood as expressions of worship and scholarly responsibility. Digital technology therefore functions not merely as a measurement tool but also as a reflection of ethical academic honesty and professionalism.

One of the stages most vulnerable to dehumanization emerges during the evaluation process conducted through the Internal Quality Audit (AMI). Digital quality audits frequently adopt an interrogative character because they assess compliance primarily on the basis of quantitative data displayed on digital dashboards, causing them to be perceived as threats to institutional units or academic communities experiencing difficulties with digital reporting. Critiques of the audit society demonstrate that auditing can become an oppressive ritual of verification when detached from dialogue, learning, and substantive improvement (Mzimela & Moyo, 2026; Power, 1997). By adopting the values of Saling Setuhu, the evaluation stage is deconstructed and reconstructed as a moment of collective reflection intended to realign the institutional vision for the common good. Quality auditors are repositioned as mentors (*mursyid*) in the spirit of the *pesantren* tradition, allowing the audit process to proceed through the principles of cultural dialogue and relationships grounded in *ukhuwah*. Organizational learning theory likewise suggests that effective evaluation requires psychological safety so that organizational members feel secure in

disclosing information, acknowledging shortcomings, and learning from mistakes without fear of embarrassment (Edmondson, 1999; Senge, 1990) particularly given empirical evidence demonstrating that technological pressures reduce academic well-being and performance (Tu et al., 2025). Consequently, real-time dashboard data are collectively interpreted as reflective resources for strengthening institutional sustainability and competitiveness.

The reflective outcomes generated through the Internal Quality Audit (AMI) subsequently become the foundation for the control stage. Deviations from global quality assurance standards are addressed through a respectful deliberative mechanism characteristic of the Malay customary tradition embodied in Simbur Cahaya, while simultaneously taking into account the psychological and spiritual well-being of lecturers and educational staff. Accordingly, the Quality Assurance Institute (LPM) of UQI should adopt forms of social harmony contextualized through the philosophy of Simbur Cahaya. Within the restorative justice literature, responses to deviations become more meaningful when directed toward restoring relationships, strengthening collective responsibility, and promoting social reintegration rather than merely imposing sanctions (Braithwaite, 1989; Zehr, 2002). Within this framework, quality control in digital governance is oriented toward system restoration and a more balanced evaluation of lecturers' performance while preserving the humanistic dimensions of academic life. Such an orientation prevents institutions from becoming trapped in rigid bureaucratic systems that suppress academic creativity and innovation.

As the final stage, the entire PPEPP cycle ultimately culminates in the continuous improvement of educational quality standards at UQI Indralaya. In the era of digital Quality 4.0, UQI utilizes the efficiency of digital systems to enhance quality standards periodically and continuously. This improvement is grounded in the harmonious integration of reflective real-time data evaluation (Saling Setiti) and collectively endorsed customary values that serve as the institution's guiding orientation (Saling Setuhu), rather than individual ambitions aimed solely at achieving external performance satisfaction. Within the tradition of improvement science, sustainable quality improvement requires not only data but also learning communities, evidence-informed improvement designs, and the active involvement of actors who understand their local contexts (Bryk et al., 2015). Educational management practices rooted in the *pesantrén* tradition demonstrate that the cycles of

planning, implementation, and evaluation can be deliberately directed toward fostering students' leadership character (Putra & Mujahid, 2025). Accordingly, the PPEPP cycle at UQI Indralaya can likewise be oriented not merely toward quality compliance but also toward character development. Quality improvement thus becomes a means of strengthening UQI's institutional competitiveness within the global academic landscape without compromising the fundamental identity of the *pesantren* tradition and the local wisdom of South Sumatra as the enduring spirit and cultural foundation of the institution. Through the internalization of the noble social philosophy of Simbur Cahaya together with the integration of the work ethics of Saling Setiti and Saling Setuhu, UQI is expected to produce graduates who possess not only the academic capacity required to respond to the demands of the global Industry 4.0 era but also moral character grounded in ethical and spiritual values (Abnoulgid et al., 2025; Manaf et al., 2026).



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for the Reconstruction of Humanized Digital Governance at Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University (UQI) Indralaya

D. CONCLUSION

This study reconstructs a humanistic digital quality governance framework at Ittifaqiah Al-Qur'an University (UQI) Indralaya through the integration of the ethnopedagogical values of South Sumatra and pesantren spirituality. Through the reconstruction of the PPEPP cycle, *Simbur Cahaya* serves as the ethical foundation for the establishment and control of quality standards as a form of academic customary law; *Saling Setiti* strengthens professional precision and data accountability during the implementation stage through the ethic of *itqan*; while *Saling Setuhu* transforms evaluation into a dialogic, reflective, and collective process grounded in the spirit of *ukhuwah*. Accordingly, Quality 4.0 does not have to sever the institution's cultural and spiritual roots but can instead function as a means of strengthening a quality culture that is precise, ethical, and human-centered.

From a policy perspective, these findings imply that Quality Assurance Units (Lembaga Penjaminan Mutu/LPM) and the leadership of Private Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIS) should design digital Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) instruments that extend beyond document compliance by incorporating quality culture indicators grounded in local and spiritual values. Internal Quality Audits should be positioned as dialogic mentoring forums rather than interrogative compliance mechanisms, while considerations of lecturers' psychological well-being and administrative workload should be integrated into institutional quality policies. At the national regulatory level, the development of the PPEPP cycle and accreditation standards should provide greater scope for the contextualization of local and religious values as legitimate dimensions of quality, in line with the growing demand to move beyond procedural compliance with imported quality models.

This study is limited to a conceptual-philosophical framework based on a single institutional context. Future research is recommended to conduct expert validation of the proposed model, examine its implementation through case studies or action research in multiple pesantren-based PTKIS, develop instruments to measure quality culture based on *Simbur Cahaya*, *Saling Setiti*, and *Saling Setuhu*, and empirically investigate the effects of this humanistic model on technostress, job satisfaction, and graduate quality. Comparative studies across regions with different local wisdom traditions may also contribute to strengthening the theoretical generalizability of the proposed framework.

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