

Quality Assurance Practices and Institutional Performance in Higher Education Institutions: The Role of Strategic Leadership and Organizational Culture

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Abstract

Activities related to the quality assurance (QA) have become an indispensable element in the improvement of higher education (HE) effectiveness and competitiveness. Although significant investments have been made in quality assurance systems it is still under study how much these practices can contribute to an institutions performance. Hence, the focus of this study is on how the quality assurance (QA) practices affect institutional performance in higher education institutions, focusing on the strategic leadership and organizational culture dimensions. A Quantitative approach that includes cross sectional survey design was used. The subjects were faculty members, academic administration and Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) staff of public sector Universities of Pakistan. Stratified random sampling method was used to select a sample of 300 for the study, however after removing missing values sample of 250 response was used to analyze the data.. A structured questionnaires designed and based on validated instruments were used to collect data on the practice of quality assurance, strategic leadership, organizational culture and institutional performance. SPSS was used as an analysis method for the data collected. The results showed that the quality assurance practices had a significant positive effect on institutional performance. The findings also suggested that strategic leadership has a huge role in strengthening the relationship between quality assurance practices and the institutions' performances by enabling the effective implementation of the quality initiatives. Furthermore, it was discovered that the practices of quality assurance are significantly affected by organizational culture, thus creating an environment conducive to continuous improvement and institutional excellence. The scope of the study is an addition to existing literature on higher education management, offering empirical insights on the significance of quality dealing with, strategic management and organizational culture for better higher education management. The results hold implications for settings such as university administrations, university policymakers and quality assurance practitioners wishing to improve institutional effectiveness, sustainability, academic excellence, and enabling strategic quality management practices.

Keywords: Quality Enhancement; Institutional Effectiveness; Strategic Governance; Academic Culture; Educational Quality Management.

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1. Introduction

Today, in the dynamic global, accountability-driven environment, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide face an extremely competitive environment where stakeholders, with increasing pressure, scrutiny and high expectations, monitor the performance of HEIs through their outputs. Quality assurance (QA) in this context has emerged as a basic process of enhancing the effectiveness of the institutions and of ensuring continuous improvement in all areas, namely academic, research and administrative. According to Harvey and Green (1993), Sarrico, (2022) and Vlăsceanu et al. (2005), quality assurance in higher education is a set of systematic policies, procedures and evaluation which help to ensure and enhance academic standards and the performance of the institution. It is well understood that quality assurance plays a strong role in the reputation, accreditation and recognition of institutions. The concept of institutional performance in higher education is multidimensional and encompasses the quality of

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teaching, research productivity, satisfaction of higher education students, effectiveness of governance, and societal contribution. The study proposed by Mandefro et al. (2026) and Mandefro et al. (2025) stated that department and faculty leaders have a greater impact on building a quality culture in universities. Currently, leadership practices are ineffective because they overlook key factors. The study suggests leaders use a more complete approach, and that university policies should better support a strong quality culture.

Most of the success in the pursuit of high institutional performance relies on the effectiveness of the quality assurance system in its implementation and internalization in the institution. Although many universities, especially in developing nations, have developed protocols for quality assurance, there can be inconsistency between the policy and implementation that may result in irregular results and hindered institutional developments (Stensaker, (2009), Javed, (2023)). Therefore, quality assurance should not only exist as a formal requirement but should also be embedded within institutional processes and practices. Effective implementation of quality assurance systems contributes significantly to institutional development and continuous improvement. Consequently, institutions increasingly seek mechanisms that can strengthen the effectiveness of quality assurance practices and their contribution to performance outcomes. Leadership supports quality goals at three public universities in Ethiopia, with input from 1029 academic staff. The findings show that departmental leadership is key to improving quality. The study also proposed multiple directions to address quality issues and shares new insights into leadership approaches as described by Mandefro et al. (2025). The study by Albaroudi et al. (2025) and Iqbal et al. (2023) stated that culture affects university performance in Saudi Arabian higher education and explores the roles of transformational and transactional leadership in this connection. The study findings show that a strong quality culture boosts university performance directly and through leadership, though transactional leadership has only a partly significant effect. However, this study is limited by its cross-sectional design and its focus only university administrators.

Strategic leadership is an important aspect of having effective quality assurance implementation. Strategic leaders in higher education institutions are tasked with establishing direction, making decisions on institutional priorities, and fostering a culture of accountability and continuing improvement. The focus of transformational and strategic leadership is most relevant in the context of institutional objectives and quality improvement programs. Bolden et al. (2012) and Sułkowski, (2023) suggest that great leadership in universities helps to build processes for innovation, teamwork and quality-based decision making, which in turn makes for better performance. Leaders who are willing to participate with QA systems open the door to a shared responsibility for quality rather than a compliance responsibility. The study presented in Săndulescu et al. (2025) and Makki et al. (2023) highlights that university quality is shaped by internal and external factors, such as globalization and changing student needs. It argues that building a strong quality culture requires a clear strategy that combines self-evaluation, outside assessment, academic values, and ongoing improvement. Likewise, alongside leadership, organizational culture is one of the important elements that affect the success of quality assurance activities and institutional performance. Organizational culture is defined as the values, norms and behaviors that influence interpersonal behaviors and tasks of members of an institution (Jerab, & Mabrouk (2023)). A culture focused on quality fosters transparency, teamwork, accountability, and a spirit of continuous improvement. A weak or disjointed culture, on the other hand, may impede efficient implementation of QA practices, thus causing resistance to change and reducing institutional effectiveness. Research indicates that strong cultures of quality in institutions have a higher likelihood of improving performance outcomes in a sustainable way (Kosłowski, (2006), Kayyali (2023)).

The studies examined what makes quality assurance systems (QAS) effective in Portuguese universities and how they impact teaching, research, and community outcomes. The results show that strong management support and leadership are the key factors for QAS success. Moreover, these studies show that effective QAS turn resources and participation into better performance and offer practical advice for improving quality in higher education Serrano et al. (2025) and Serrano et al. (2026). The university's culture shared values, leadership, and participation shapes the success of quality assurance. Strong cultures support improvement and teamwork, while resistance and top-down decisions can affect QA. Universities should use their strengths to build quality practices that fit both external standards and their own mission, as described by Joshua (2025) and Nugraha et al. (2023). Similarly,

Therefore, there is an interdependence and reinforcement relationship among quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, organizational culture, and institutional performance. Quality assurance systems act as the logical and enabling vehicle for monitoring and enhancing performance, while strategic leadership acts as the vehicle through which institutions are directed, motivated and committed to improvement. Meanwhile, organizational culture ensures that quality values are maintained for sustained engagement and acceptance within the institution. When these three components are not aligned, quality assurance processes can become overly procedural and lose their effect on institutional performance (Bollaert, 2014). Hence, the purpose of this study is rooted in the importance of in-depth

research into the effect of quality assurance practices on the performance of higher education institutions, focusing on the influence of strategic leadership and organizational culture. This understanding is critical for educational leaders, quality assurance agencies, higher education policymakers, and other stakeholders seeking to improve institutional effectiveness as a critical factor in global competitiveness (Aldhobaib, 2024, Stephenson, 2004).

2. Review of Literature

Quality assurance (QA) in higher education has gained significant importance as universities worldwide strive to enhance academic standards, institutional accountability, and global competitiveness. The literature consistently highlights that QA systems are designed to ensure continuous improvement in teaching, learning, research, and governance processes within higher education institutions (Harvey & Green, 1993). QA is not merely a regulatory requirement but a strategic mechanism that fosters institutional development and sustainable academic excellence (Vlăsceanu et al., 2005). Several studies emphasize that effective implementation of QA practices positively influences institutional performance. QA mechanisms such as internal audits, accreditation processes, performance evaluations, and curriculum reviews help institutions identify weaknesses and implement corrective measures (Stensaker, 2009). These processes contribute to improved academic delivery, enhanced student satisfaction, and stronger institutional reputation. However, research also indicates that in many developing contexts, QA systems often remain compliance-driven rather than improvement-oriented, limiting their overall impact on performance outcomes (Mohzana et al., 2024). Strategic leadership has been identified as a crucial factor in ensuring the success of QA initiatives in higher education. Leadership in academic institutions involves setting vision, aligning institutional goals with quality standards, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. Bolden et al. (2012) and Marshall et al. (2011) argue that leadership effectiveness in universities is strongly associated with institutional performance, particularly when leaders adopt transformational approaches that encourage innovation and shared responsibility. Leaders who actively engage in QA processes are more likely to create accountability structures and motivate faculty participation in quality enhancement activities. Similarly, to leadership, organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping the effectiveness of QA practices. Organizational culture refers to shared values, norms, and behavioral expectations that influence how individuals within an institution behave and perform (Jerab, & Mabrouk (2023)). A strong culture of quality promotes collaboration, transparency, and commitment to institutional goals. Conversely, weak organizational cultures often result in resistance to change, poor communication, and ineffective implementation of QA policies. Studies suggest that quality-oriented cultures significantly enhance institutional performance by embedding quality values into everyday academic and administrative practices (Harvey, 2024). The literature further highlights the interrelationship between QA practices, strategic leadership, and organizational culture. QA systems provide the structural framework for performance evaluation, while leadership ensures direction and motivation. Organizational culture, on the other hand, sustains long-term engagement and institutional commitment to quality. Bollaert (2014) emphasizes that the effectiveness of QA systems largely depends on how well they are integrated into institutional culture and supported by leadership structures. Moreover, empirical evidence suggests that institutions with strong leadership and a positive organizational culture are more successful in implementing QA practices effectively, leading to improved institutional outcomes such as higher student achievement, better research productivity, and enhanced institutional reputation (Aldhobaib, 2024). However, gaps in the literature indicate that many institutions still struggle with aligning QA mechanisms with leadership strategies and cultural dynamics, particularly in developing higher education systems. Thus the existing literature establishes that quality assurance practices are essential for improving institutional performance in higher education. However, their effectiveness is significantly influenced by strategic leadership and organizational culture. This interconnected relationship highlights the need for further empirical investigation to understand how these variables interact to enhance institutional performance in diverse educational contexts.

2.1. *Quality Assurance Practices in Higher Education*

In recent years, the need for accountability, transparency, institutional effectiveness and international competitiveness has translated into quality assurance (QA) becoming an essential pillar in higher education systems globally. A higher education institution (HEI) is expected to be excellent in teaching, research, governance and community engagement, and satisfy the expectations of governments, accreditation agencies, employers, students and society in general. Thus, the quality assurance process has been developed from a regulatory process to a tool for institutional improvement and sustainability.

As stated by Harvey and Green (1993) there are many aspects of understanding the concept of quality in higher education, such as excellence, fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation, conformance to standards, etc.

The dimensions have had a significant impact on the evolution of quality assurance systems in higher education systems. Quality assurance involves the continuous monitoring, evaluation and enhancement of educational quality and institutional performance and is implemented through systematic processes and procedures (Vlăsceanu et al. 2005). These processes include review of curriculum, academic audits, student evaluation, faculty performance assessment, accreditation process, and continuous quality improvement activities.

As presented in Emmanuel (2026), explores how quality assurance mechanisms contribute to improved governance, academic performance, and institutional accountability. Implementing a quality structured framework, the research analyzes quality management practices within higher education institutions and evaluates their influence on organizational. The results show that institutions with high quality assurance systems demonstrate higher levels of institutional effectiveness and improved academic standards. Moreover, Another study evaluates the QAS and its impact on institutional performance (IP) in HEIs. The study used stakeholder theory to investigate how management supports faculty and infrastructure and student engagement shape QAS effectiveness. The study used a quantitative design in Portugal HEIs. The findings show that top management support is the strongest predictors of QAS effectiveness, while infrastructure quality and faculty engagement also make significant contributions (Serrano et al. 2025). The recent study presented in (Iqbal et al. 2025) explored the impact of quality management initiatives on HEI performance and mediating role of academic accreditation using a well organized quantitative approach. The study collected data from 370 participants working in more than 70 HEIs located in UAE. The findings indicate that HEIs performance can be significantly improved using quality management initiatives especially leadership commitment and professional development to achieve academic accreditation as well as to enhance overall institutional performance.

The effectiveness of quality assurance has been proven over time and is a positive to institutional effectiveness. Stensaker (2009) found that quality assurance systems can be used to help with evidence-based decision making, improve institutional accountability and promote continuous improvement. Likewise, Mohzana et al. (2024) found that those institutions with a comprehensive quality assurance system are more likely to have better academic results; higher levels of satisfaction amongst stakeholders; and higher organizational performance. Despite significant investments in quality assurance systems, however, many institutions still have a significant challenge implementing the systems because of limited resources, insufficient stakeholder involvement and resistance to organizational change.

2.2. Institutional Performance in Higher Education

The institutional performance is a multi-dimensional concept which captures the level of achievement by higher education institutions in relation to their academic, administrative, research and societal goals. The focus on key performance indicators (KPI) like student achievement, graduate employability, research productivity, institutional reputation, stakeholder satisfaction, innovation and financial sustainability is increasing in the evaluation of universities.

In an article, Kaplan and Norton (1996) noted that a company's performance needs to be evaluated from many vantage points and not just financial ones. Within higher education, institutional performance is reflected in the quality of teaching, the quality of research, the efficiency of governance, the quality of the services provided to students, and the activities of the institution in the community. Effective institutions are ones that are able to deliver strategic outcomes and remain high performance, high quality and accountable.

Many studies have confirmed the positive correlation of quality assurance practices with the performance of the institution. Bollaert (2014) suggests that the mechanisms of quality assurance offer systematic solutions to support institutions in identifying weaknesses, taking corrective measures, and tracking the fulfillment of institutional objectives. Also, the European University Association (Aldhobaib, 2024) stated that institutions with good quality assurance systems have greater academic effectiveness, trust in the institution and organizational sustainability.

Furthermore, quality assurance will foster an attitude of evaluation and ongoing improvement, helping institutions meet evolving educational and social needs. Consequently, the concept of institutional performance has come to be perceived as the result of effective quality management systems that are embedded in institutional processes.

2.3. Leadership and Quality Assurance in strategy

An effective quality assurance program in higher education institutions is dependent on strategic leadership. The strategic leader is a key contributor to the creation of institutional vision, goal setting, resource allocation, and quality enhancement and innovation climate.

Bolden et al. (2012) state that leadership in higher education goes beyond administrative management, and requires the ability to inspire individuals and groups to attain common institutional goals. Strategic leaders positively impact organizational performance through collaboration, innovation and evidence-based decision making processes. Leadership is essential for a commitment to the institutional's quality standards and continuous improvement practices in the context of quality assurance.

Ahmad, S., & Ahmed, A. (2023) state how university leaders' views and attitudes affect how they carry out quality assurance (QA). Researchers talked to nine leaders from two universities and analyzed the interviews for common themes. The findings show leaders' views shape their style. Transformational leaders use QA to improve teaching and research. However, school policies or leaders' backgrounds may also affect leadership. Barlan (2023) investigated how well selected Philippine universities follow PQA quality standards. Leadership requirements had very high compliance. Strategy requirements were high to very high. Even without submitting for PQA assessment, many schools were ready for Level 1 criteria. The study recommends leaders use a continuous improvement plan to keep meeting quality standards and improve over time. Rivera et al. (2025) investigated three key parts of Internal Quality Assurance Systems (IQAS) in various HEIs. Researchers interviewed six directors about their system's mission, key decisions, and decision-making processes. The main goal of IQAS is to assist the institution in reaching its mission. Important decisions include using integrated information systems for self-evaluation, meeting both accreditation and standards. Common tools for decision-making are national accreditation models and the Balanced Scorecard.

The transformational leadership theory offers a good approach to understanding the role of leadership in relation to quality assurance. Transformational leaders inspire staff to perform to their maximum by creating a vision, promoting learning and development, and facilitating organizational change (Meng (2022), Bass & Avolio, 1993). Research has demonstrated that the Transformational Leadership has a positive impact on the performance of the institution by improving employee engagement, organizational commitment and quality-oriented behaviors. In addition, good leaders help to implement quality assurance systems by fostering faculty involvement, creating accountability and incorporating quality goals into strategic planning efforts. Bolden et al. (2012) identified that the institutions that have good leadership support are more likely to improve their sustainable quality and improve their organizational performance. Hence, strategic leadership is a major enabler and plays a significant role in enhancing the effectiveness of quality assurance practices and greatly contributes to the success of an institution.

2.4. Organization Culture and Institutional Performance

Another key element that affects the effectiveness of quality assurance practices and institutional performance is organizational culture. Organizational culture is defined as the values, beliefs, assumptions and behavioral norms that guide the interactions and behavior of the organization's members (Jerab, & Mabrouk (2023)).

Organisational culture has a strong impact on the attitudes towards quality, innovation, collaboration and change in higher education institution. A culture that focuses on quality encourages accountability, transparency, collaboration and continuous improvement. These cultures enable faculty and administrators to be engaged in quality assurance and invest in institutional improvement efforts. The impact of organizational culture and innovation on organizational performance was described by Riza et al (2025). In this study, researchers surveyed 136 senior officials to study leadership and culture in universities. The study found that participative leadership boosts both innovation and commitment. A supportive culture also helps with innovation and commitment, but does not directly improve performance. Ajmal et al. (2025) and Smagul et al. (2025) state that the impact of knowledge-centered culture (KCC) and absorptive capacity (AC) on driving organizational performance. In this study, a cross-sectional research design was used. 247 self-administered questionnaires were used to gather information from the faculty members of public sector universities in Punjab, Pakistan. The results show that the knowledge-creation process partially mediates the relationship between AC and organizational performance. Moreover, a slightly negative influence exists between AC and knowledge creation due to a KCC. Organizational culture affects the level of effectiveness because it affects behaviours and decision making process of the employees, as described by Jerab, & Mabrouk (2023). Organizations with supportive and collaborative cultures are more likely to be successful in implementing quality assurance systems. Harvey (2006) has believed that a strong culture of quality fosters an institution where quality enhancement becomes part of the institutional culture and is not restricted to compliance.

By contrast, poor organizational culture can result in a negative attitude toward change, poor communication, and low stakeholder engagement. These can compromise the quality assurance process and have a negative impact on institutional performance. Bollaert (2014) showed that organizational culture is an important factor in maintaining quality assurance efforts and in improving an institution's quality over time.

Recent research has also highlighted the mediating role of organizational culture between QAs and outcomes of the organization. Collaborative, learning, and continuous improvement cultures are more likely to foster excellence in teaching, research, and governance within institutions.

The interrelationship between the Quality Assurance Practices, Strategic Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Institutional Performance

The literature suggests a complex interplay and mutual reinforcement between quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, organizational culture and institutional performance. Quality assurance is the structural mechanism for monitoring and enhancing institutional effectiveness and strategic leadership is the direction, motivation and commitment needed to achieve the successful implementation. Organizational culture, in turn, fosters and maintains the quality enhancement efforts.

Bollaert (2014) pointed out that the ideal quality assurance systems are those that are integrated with leadership and organizational culture. Strategic leaders have a significant impact in fostering a culture that values quality within the institution and motivating stakeholders to be involved in quality improvement activities. Likewise, a positive organisational culture boosts the acceptance and sustainability of quality assurance practices.

The European University Association (Aldhobaib, 2024) found that universities with a high level of leadership commitment and good cultures of quality assurance achieve better results as a rule than those in which quality assurance is accorded only administrative status. In addition, empirical studies have found that the synergistic effect of quality assurance practices, strategic leadership and organizational culture have a significant impact on institutional effectiveness, academic excellence, and organizational sustainability.

Though there has been some research on this topic, there is a significant lack of knowledge about how these factors interrelate to each other in the context of higher education institutions in developing countries. While previous research has tended to investigate individual relationships, the integrated effect of quality assurance practices with strategic leadership and institutional culture on institutional performance has been ignored. Thus, the present study aims to fill this gap by examining the interaction effect of these factors on the performance of the institutions in higher education institutions.

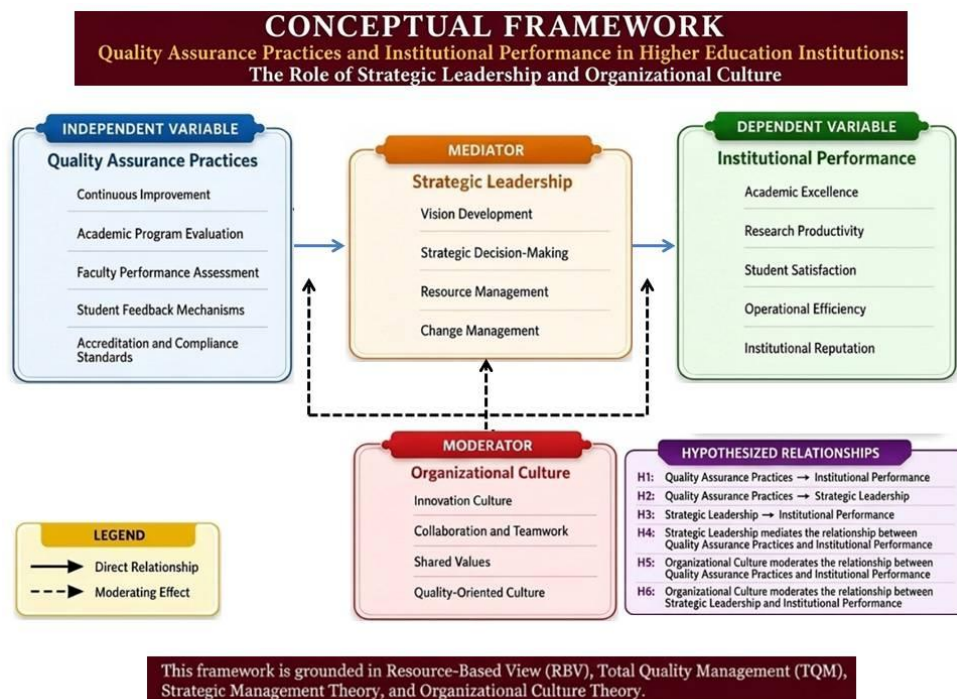


Figure 1. The conceptual framework

3. Research Gap

While there have been a number of studies that have demonstrated the relationship among the quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, organizational culture, and institutional performance, little research has been conducted in a comprehensive framework. In addition, the lack of empirical research on the combined effect of strategic leadership and organizational culture on enhancing the effectiveness of quality assurance practices on the institutional performance is a gap that needs to be filled. In light of this, this study seeks to make a contribution to the existing body of knowledge by gathering empirical evidence on the integrated role of quality assurance, leadership and organizational culture to improve the performance of an institution.

4. Methodology

The study adopted quantitative, cross sectional survey research design in the context of higher education institutions to analyzed the correlation between quality assurance practices and institutional performance in the study, specifically, strategic leadership and institutional culture. The respondents of the study were faculty members, academic administrators and quality assurance officers from both public and private higher education institutions. The sampling technique employed was proportionate stratified random sampling which allowed equal sample size of each category of respondents. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire that was derived from some of the validated instruments in the literature which were adapted in the form of likert type items with their response terms covering the areas of quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, organizational culture and institutional performance. Total 300 questionnaire were distributed and after removing missing values sample size of 250 was use to analyze the data. Validity was established by having an expert evaluate or review the instrument and reliability through use of Cronbach's alpha which was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The data were analyzed using SPSS programs, descriptive and inferential statistics were also used being the mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to determine the relationship and predictive factors of the variables. The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards by ensuring that all participants were free to participate, their responses were kept confidential and informed consent was obtained from everyone.

5. Results of the Study

This study examined the relationship between strategic leadership, institutional performance, organization culture and QA practices in HEIs. Data was collected from 250 respondents and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The findings provide evidence regarding the individual characteristics of the study variables, the strength of the relationships among them, and their relative contributions to institutional performance and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 250)

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality Assurance Practices	3.78	0.62
Strategic Leadership	3.85	0.58
Organizational Culture	3.74	0.65
Institutional Performance	3.80	0.60

The descriptive results indicate that all variables have mean values above the midpoint (3.0), showing a generally positive perception of quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, organizational culture, and institutional performance in higher education institutions. Strategic leadership recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.58$), suggesting that respondents generally perceived leadership practices within their institutions positively. This finding shows that leaders are viewed as playing an active role in establishing strategic direction and supporting institutional activities. Strategic leadership has the highest mean score ($M = 3.85$), suggesting that respondents perceive leadership practices as relatively strong compared to other variables. Institutional performance shows the second-highest mean score ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.60$), followed closely by quality assurance practices ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.62$). These values indicate that respondents generally viewed the performance of their institutions and the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms positively. Organizational culture recorded a slightly lower mean score ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.65$), although it remained well above the scale midpoint. The standard deviation values indicate moderate variation in responses, showing a reasonable level of consistency among participants as shown in

Table 2. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of descriptive results indicates reasonably consistent and positive perceptions across all four constructs.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis among Variables

Variables	QAP	SL	OC	IP
Quality Assurance Practices	1			
Strategic Leadership	.62**	1		
Organizational Culture	.58**	.65**	1	
Institutional Performance	.70**	.68**	.66**	1

Note: $p < 0.01$

The correlation analysis reveals significant positive relationships among all study variables. Quality assurance practices show a strong positive correlation with institutional performance ($r = .70$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that better QA implementation is associated with improved institutional outcomes. Strategic leadership is also strongly correlated with institutional performance ($r = .68$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that effective leadership contributes significantly to institutional success. Similarly, organizational culture demonstrates a strong positive relationship with institutional performance ($r = .66$, $p < 0.01$), highlighting the importance of a supportive and quality-oriented culture in higher education institutions as based on Table 3. Overall, the correlation results demonstrate that QAP, SL, and OC are closely connected with institutional performance and with one another.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Institutional Performance

Predictor Variables	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Quality Assurance Practices	.35	6.42	.000
Strategic Leadership	.31	5.88	.000
Organizational Culture	.28	5.21	.000

$R^2 = 0.64$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.63$, $F = 145.32$, $p < 0.001$

The overall regression model is statistically significant ($F = 145.32$, $p < 0.001$) and explains 64% of the variance in institutional performance ($R^2 = 0.64$). The adjusted R^2 value of 0.63 further indicates that the model retains substantial explanatory power after accounting for the number of predictors included. This represents a relatively strong proportion of explained variance and suggests that the three organizational factors collectively provide substantial explanatory value for differences in institutional performance. The regression analysis indicates that the model explains 64% of the variance in institutional performance ($R^2 = 0.64$), which is a strong explanatory power. All three predictors—quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, and organizational culture—significantly predict institutional performance at $p < 0.001$ level. Quality assurance practices emerge as the strongest predictor ($\beta = .35$), followed by strategic leadership ($\beta = .31$) and organizational culture ($\beta = .28$). This suggests that while all variables are important, strengthening QA systems has the greatest impact on improving institutional performance in higher education institutions.

Overall, the results show that quality assurance practices, strategic leadership, and organizational culture all play important roles in predicting how well an institution performs. Quality assurance practices have the strongest impact. The findings suggest that these factors work together, so institutional performance depends on having effective quality assurance systems, strong leadership, and a positive organizational culture. For higher education institutions aiming to improve over time, it is important not to focus only on formal quality assurance processes. Leadership skills and the culture where quality policies are put into practice also deserve attention.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that quality assurance (QA) practices have a significant and positive relationship with institutional performance in higher education institutions. This result aligns with the broader body of literature which emphasizes that structured QA mechanisms are essential for enhancing academic standards, improving administrative efficiency, and ensuring continuous institutional improvement (Harvey & Green, 1993; Vlăsceanu et al., 2005). The strong predictive value of QA practices in this study suggests that institutions that systematically implement internal evaluations, accreditation processes, and continuous monitoring systems are more likely to achieve higher levels of performance in teaching, research, and governance. The results further indicate that

strategic leadership plays a significant role in influencing institutional performance. This finding is consistent with Bolden et al. (2012), who argue that leadership in higher education is a key determinant of organizational effectiveness, particularly when leaders adopt a strategic and transformational approach. In the present study, strategic leadership emerged as a strong predictor of institutional performance, indicating that leaders who provide clear vision, encourage collaboration, and promote accountability contribute meaningfully to institutional success. This suggests that QA systems alone are not sufficient unless they are supported by committed and proactive leadership that drives quality initiatives forward. Organizational culture was also found to have a significant positive effect on institutional performance. This finding supports (Jerab, & Mabrouk (2023)) conceptualization of organizational culture as a powerful determinant of behavior and performance within institutions. A culture that values quality, teamwork, transparency, and continuous improvement facilitates the effective implementation of QA practices. Conversely, weak or fragmented institutional cultures may hinder quality initiatives and reduce their overall impact. The present findings reinforce the idea that organizational culture acts as a sustaining force that embeds QA values into everyday institutional practices. The regression results revealed that quality assurance practices were the strongest predictor of institutional performance, followed by strategic leadership and organizational culture. This indicates that while leadership and culture are essential enabling factors, the direct implementation of QA systems has the most immediate and measurable impact on institutional outcomes. This is consistent with Stensaker (2009), who emphasized that QA mechanisms become most effective when they are systematically embedded in institutional processes rather than treated as external compliance requirements. Moreover, the study highlights the interdependent nature of QA practices, strategic leadership, and organizational culture. The findings suggest that these variables do not operate in isolation but are mutually reinforcing. Effective leadership strengthens QA implementation, while a supportive organizational culture ensures sustainability and acceptance of quality initiatives. Together, these factors create an integrated framework for enhancing institutional performance. This supports the view of Bollaert (2014), who argued that quality assurance systems achieve their highest effectiveness when aligned with institutional culture and leadership structures. However, the findings also reflect challenges commonly reported in developing higher education systems, where QA practices may exist in policy form but are inconsistently implemented at the institutional level. This gap between policy and practice highlights the need for stronger leadership commitment and cultural transformation to ensure that QA systems produce meaningful outcomes rather than remaining procedural exercises (Stensaker, 2009). The current study contributes to the existing literature by empirically confirming that QA practices significantly enhance institutional performance and that this relationship is strengthened by strategic leadership and organizational culture. The findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to quality enhancement in higher education, where structural systems, leadership behavior, and cultural values work together to improve institutional effectiveness and global competitiveness.

7. Conclusion

Based on this study, it has been concluded that the application of quality assurance practices will greatly improve the performance of an institution in higher education institutions. But with the proper leadership and organization culture, they provide a greater degree of effectiveness. The institutional improvement that achieves sustainability best results encompasses. The study found that the implementation of Quality Assurance (QA) process plays significant role in improving the performance of Institutions in Higher Education (IHEs) and it can be statistically proved that this can be achieved based on the academic, administrative, and governance processes. In essence, strategic leadership is essential to support the enhancement of institutional performance, through its vision, direction and good implementation of quality improvement programs. Moreover, an institutional good culture is associated with institutional performance, that is, by providing a common culture of "quality", "accountability", "collaboration," and "continuous improvement. The biggest contributor to institutional performance was adopting QA practices, followed by strategic leadership and organizational culture. This study also demonstrates that institutional performance gains and increases greatly when the QA systems are effectively planned and implemented with good leadership and quality-based culture. Additionally, HEIs require a comprehensive and coordinated strategy where structural (QA), human (leadership) and behavioral (culture) systems work together and in harmony for sustainable improvement. Improving these three dimensions is important for improving the global competitiveness, quality and accountability of higher education institutions overall. This study also recommended that HEIs must implement the internal Quality Assurance mechanism, build leadership potential by providing professional development programs, and foster culture of quality and accountability. This gap between frameworks for QA and institutional practices should be reconciled by policy makers. Moreover, HEIs should ensure effective strengthening of and full implementation of quality assurance (QA) systems to ensure that there is continuous institutional monitoring, internal evaluations and effective feedback mechanisms that will enhance HEIs performance. Similarly, strategy development capacity of institutional

leaders should be built using trainings and professional development activities, to support strategy in enhancing quality and holding the leaders accountable. Universities need to have a good organizational culture in terms of quality, co-operation and improvement, and they must encourage their faculty and administrative staff to share common values.

Future directions included that this research is limited with regards to self-reported data and cross-sectional design; this limits efforts at drawing causal inferences. Longitudinal designs and qualitative approaches could be useful in the future to find more insight in institutional process dynamics.

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Data Availability Statement: The data may be provided upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Ethical Considerations: The study involved the administration of a questionnaire to participants. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before completing the questionnaire. All responses were collected anonymously, and the confidentiality of participant information was maintained throughout the research process.

Ethics Statement: This study involved voluntary participation through an anonymous questionnaire survey. Before participating, all respondents were informed about the objectives of the research and provided informed consent.

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