

IMPLEMENTING TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT TO STRENGTHEN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION QUALITY: A CASE STUDY AT SMK BUDI TRESNA MUHAMMADIYAH CIREBON

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Abstract

Education must continuously adapt to social transformation and the evolving demands of the industrial sector, particularly in vocational education, where graduate competencies should align with workforce expectations. Total Quality Management (TQM) provides a comprehensive management approach that emphasizes customer focus, continuous improvement, and the involvement of all stakeholders to enhance educational quality. This study aims to analyze the implementation of TQM in strengthening the quality of vocational education at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon and to identify both its achievements and implementation challenges. A descriptive qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving the principal, teachers, students, and industry partners. Data were analyzed using an interactive model consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings indicate that TQM has contributed to improving curriculum relevance to industry needs, strengthening teacher professionalism through continuous professional development, enhancing stakeholder satisfaction, and fostering stronger collaboration with industry partners in curriculum development and competency assessment. However, the implementation of TQM remains constrained by limited qualified human resources, inadequate practical learning facilities, and restricted financial support, which hinder the sustainability of continuous quality improvement. These findings suggest that effective TQM implementation in vocational schools requires strong leadership commitment, systematic stakeholder collaboration, continuous investment in human and physical resources, and strategic partnerships with industry to establish a sustainable quality culture and improve institutional competitiveness..

Keywords: Total Quality Management, Vocational Education, Educational Quality, Continuous Improvement, Stakeholder Collaboration

A. Introduction

Education is a dynamic and continuous process that must respond to rapid social, technological, and economic changes. In the era of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0, educational institutions are expected not only to produce academically competent graduates but also individuals equipped with professional skills, adaptability, innovation, and strong ethical values. These demands are particularly significant for vocational education, whose primary mission is to prepare graduates capable of meeting the evolving needs of industry and the labor market. Consequently, improving educational quality has become a strategic priority for vocational schools seeking to enhance institutional competitiveness and graduate employability.

One management approach that has been widely recognized for improving organizational quality is Total Quality Management (TQM). Originally developed within the manufacturing sector by quality management pioneers such as Deming, Juran, and Crosby, TQM has evolved into a comprehensive management philosophy applicable to both manufacturing and service organizations, including educational institutions. Rather than functioning merely as a quality control technique, TQM emphasizes continuous improvement, customer focus, evidence-based decision-making, teamwork, and the active participation of all organizational members in achieving organizational excellence. Within educational settings, these principles encourage schools to develop sustainable quality cultures in which administrators, teachers, students, parents, and external stakeholders collaborate to improve institutional performance.

The relevance of TQM is particularly evident in vocational education. Unlike general education, vocational schools are directly responsible for preparing graduates who possess competencies aligned with industrial standards and workforce expectations. Therefore, educational quality in vocational schools should be assessed not only through academic achievement but also through curriculum relevance, practical learning experiences, industry collaboration, graduate employability, stakeholder satisfaction, and institutional responsiveness to technological developments. TQM provides an appropriate management framework because its principles of customer focus, continuous improvement, and total involvement support the development of competency-based education that remains responsive to changes in industrial demands.

Recent studies have demonstrated the positive contribution of TQM to educational quality. Ibrahim and Rusdiana (2021) argued that TQM strengthens institutional effectiveness through systematic quality management and stakeholder participation, while Fangestu et al. (2025) reported that TQM supports competency-based curriculum development in vocational schools by strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and industry. Likewise, Yirga and Beshir (2025) emphasized that continuous improvement and stakeholder engagement significantly enhance organizational innovation and competitiveness. Despite these findings, empirical studies focusing specifically on the implementation of TQM in Indonesian vocational schools remain limited, particularly those examining how TQM principles are translated into school management practices that directly support educational quality improvement.

SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon was selected as the case study because it represents a vocational institution actively implementing TQM principles to strengthen educational quality. The school has established competency-based study programs, conducts periodic curriculum evaluations involving industry representatives, provides industrial internship opportunities, and continuously develops teacher competencies through professional development activities. Furthermore, the school maintains partnerships with business and industrial sectors to ensure that graduates possess competencies aligned with labor market requirements. At the same time, the school

continues to face practical challenges, including limitations in qualified human resources, learning facilities, and financial support. These characteristics make SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon an appropriate case for examining both the achievements and challenges of TQM implementation in vocational education.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Total Quality Management in strengthening educational quality at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon. Specifically, the study explores how TQM principles are applied within the school's management system, identifies the achievements resulting from their implementation, examines the challenges encountered during the implementation process, and discusses the practical implications of TQM for improving quality management in vocational education institutions.

B.Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study design to investigate the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in strengthening educational quality at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of management practices, stakeholder experiences, and organizational processes within the natural setting of a vocational school. The study focused on examining how TQM principles were implemented, the achievements resulting from their implementation, the challenges encountered, and their implications for vocational education quality.

The research was conducted at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon, a vocational high school that has implemented competency-based education and established partnerships with industry. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their direct involvement in school quality management. The participants consisted of the principal, one Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, one Vice Principal for Student Affairs, one Vice Principal for Religious Affairs, one Vice Principal for Industrial Relations, one Vice Principal for Facilities and Infrastructure, one heads of vocational programs, five teachers, five students, and two industry representative.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis. The interview guide was developed based on the core principles of Total Quality Management, including customer focus, continuous improvement, total involvement, leadership commitment, and stakeholder collaboration. The interviews explored participants' experiences regarding curriculum development, quality assurance practices, teacher professional development, industry partnerships, and challenges in implementing TQM.

Observations were conducted during classroom learning, practical workshops, curriculum coordination meetings, and quality assurance activities. The observation focused on teaching and learning practices, stakeholder participation, the utilization of educational facilities, interactions between teachers and students, and the implementation of continuous quality improvement processes within the school.

Documentation served as complementary evidence and included school strategic plans, curriculum documents, quality assurance reports, accreditation reports, teacher professional development records, student achievement reports, internship cooperation agreements, meeting minutes, and other institutional documents related to quality management implementation.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of four stages: (1) data collection, (2) data condensation, (3) data display, and (4) conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, coding, categorizing, and organizing information according to the main themes of TQM implementation. The categorized data were subsequently presented in narrative matrices to facilitate pattern identification, comparison among participants, and interpretation of findings. Conclusions were continuously verified throughout the analysis process to ensure consistency between empirical evidence and emerging interpretations.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several validation strategies were employed. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from school leaders, teachers, students, and industry partners. Method triangulation was achieved by integrating interview data, observation results, and documentary evidence. In addition, member checking was performed by asking selected participants to review interview summaries to ensure that the researchers accurately represented their perspectives. Peer debriefing with fellow researchers was also undertaken to minimize subjective bias during data interpretation. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the research findings.

C. Finding and Discussion

Total Quality Management (TQM)

The findings indicate that the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon has progressed beyond the adoption of isolated quality improvement activities toward the institutionalization of quality-oriented management practices. Rather than functioning solely as a managerial program, TQM has gradually become embedded in the school's organizational culture through continuous evaluation, collaborative decision-making, and stakeholder participation. This institutionalization is reflected in the integration of quality principles into curriculum development, teacher professional development, industry collaboration, and routine quality assurance activities. Such findings support Sallis' perspective that educational quality can only be sustained when continuous improvement becomes part of the organizational culture rather than a temporary administrative initiative.

A significant indicator of TQM institutionalization is the role of school leadership. The principal does not merely supervise administrative processes but acts as a transformational leader who establishes a shared vision of quality, encourages innovation, and promotes active participation among teachers and educational staff. Leadership commitment is demonstrated through regular curriculum evaluation meetings, continuous

professional development programs, and systematic collaboration with industry partners. This finding aligns with Deming's quality philosophy, which emphasizes leadership as the primary driver of organizational transformation because quality improvement depends on management commitment rather than technical procedures alone.

The study also demonstrates that decision-making processes increasingly reflect evidence-based management principles. Decisions regarding curriculum revision, teacher training priorities, procurement of learning facilities, and partnership development are based on stakeholder feedback, student satisfaction surveys, graduate employment information, and recommendations from industry representatives. Consequently, quality improvement initiatives are no longer determined solely by administrative considerations but are supported by empirical information collected from multiple stakeholders. This participatory decision-making process reflects one of the core principles of TQM, namely organizational learning through continuous feedback and evaluation.

Furthermore, the implementation of TQM has strengthened the school's internal quality assurance system. Annual curriculum reviews, monitoring of learning outcomes, teacher performance evaluation, and periodic assessment of stakeholder satisfaction indicate that quality assurance has become an ongoing management process rather than a compliance activity conducted solely for accreditation purposes. Continuous monitoring enables the school to identify weaknesses, evaluate corrective actions, and formulate strategic improvements. This demonstrates that quality assurance functions not merely as an evaluation mechanism but also as a strategic instrument supporting organizational learning and sustainable institutional development.

Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that the institutionalization of TQM has not yet reached its optimal level. Resource limitations, particularly regarding qualified vocational teachers, practical learning facilities, and financial support, continue to constrain the sustainability of continuous improvement initiatives. Moreover, some quality improvement activities remain highly dependent on school leadership, indicating that quality culture has not yet been fully internalized across all organizational levels. These findings suggest that long-term sustainability requires stronger institutional policies, systematic capacity building, and broader stakeholder ownership to ensure that TQM becomes an enduring organizational value rather than a leadership-dependent initiative.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the successful implementation of TQM in vocational education should be evaluated not only through improvements in curriculum relevance, teacher competence, or stakeholder satisfaction but also through the extent to which quality management principles become embedded within school governance, organizational culture, participatory leadership, evidence-based decision-making, and internal quality assurance systems. These dimensions ultimately determine the sustainability of educational quality improvement and institutional competitiveness in vocational education.

Implementation of TQM at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon

The implementation of TQM principles at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon begins with a strong emphasis on customer focus. In this context, students are

regarded as the primary customers who should receive the best possible educational services. The school regularly conducts student satisfaction surveys regarding the learning process, teachers' instructional methods, and the availability of practical learning facilities. In addition, parents are viewed as important external customers; therefore, their feedback concerning students' academic progress, discipline, and work readiness is used as evaluation material for the school.

Furthermore, industry partners are actively involved in providing input on the competencies required in the workplace so that the curriculum remains relevant to labor market needs. SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon conducts annual curriculum evaluations involving productive subject teachers, vice principals, and heads of study programs. This evaluation process ensures continuous updates in line with technological developments and industry trends.

In developing a competency-based curriculum, the principal serves as a leader who directs curriculum development strategies, while teachers and educational staff are responsible for planning, implementation, and evaluation. Students are also involved through discussion forums and questionnaires evaluating the effectiveness of learning activities. Parents and alumni are given opportunities to provide constructive suggestions through school communication forums, while industry partners function as strategic collaborators in designing basic competencies, providing internship placements, and implementing competency examination

TQM Principles at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon as a Strategy for Improving Educational Quality

Improving educational quality in the era of globalization cannot be separated from increasingly complex quality demands, encompassing curriculum development, learning processes, and stakeholder involvement. These challenges are particularly significant for Vocational High Schools (SMKs), which are expected to produce graduates who are competent, work-ready, and adaptable to the needs of industry. In this context, Total Quality Management (TQM) serves as a relevant strategic approach. TQM emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement, total involvement, and customer focus as the core principles of quality achievement (Ibrahim & Rusdiana, 2021). Based on in-depth interviews and observations, it was found that SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon has implemented the following TQM principles:

Customer Focus Principle

The principle of customer focus is clearly reflected in the quality management strategy implemented at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon. The school regards students as its primary customers who are entitled to receive the highest quality educational services, while parents and the community are considered external customers with a vested interest in educational success.

The implementation of this principle is demonstrated through student satisfaction surveys, communication forums with parents, and the involvement of industry partners in providing input regarding competencies required in the workplace. This finding is

consistent with the study conducted by Rahman et al. (2023), which identified customer focus as a critical dimension of TQM influencing both operational and organizational performance.

Furthermore, the involvement of industry partners as strategic stakeholders strengthens curriculum relevance to labor market demands. In the case of SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon, industry partners not only provide internship opportunities but also actively contribute to the development of competency standards and the implementation of competency assessments. Consequently, the school ensures that its graduates possess not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills that align with workforce requirements. This practice supports the argument of Darmawan et al. (2024), who emphasized that educational institutions should establish long-term relationships with stakeholders to improve service quality and stakeholder satisfaction.

Continuous Improvement as a Quality Culture

Another key principle emphasized at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon is continuous improvement. The school conducts annual curriculum evaluations involving productive subject teachers, program coordinators, students, alumni, and industry representatives. These evaluations aim to ensure that learning materials remain aligned with technological advancements and labor market needs.

The culture of continuous improvement extends beyond curriculum development to include regular teacher training programs, the upgrading of learning facilities, and the strengthening of digital administrative systems. Antunes et al. (2021) argued that continuous improvement is the core element of TQM because it promotes innovation and sustainable competitiveness.

Within the context of vocational education, this principle is particularly important because industrial requirements continuously evolve alongside technological developments. Therefore, vocational schools must remain adaptive and ensure that their learning processes, evaluation systems, and educational services remain relevant and responsive to current industry demands. These findings are consistent with those of Wismayanti et al. (2025), who reported that the implementation of TQM has a significant positive impact on improving educational quality in vocational schools.

The Role of TQM Involvement in Quality Management Success

The development of a competency-based curriculum at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon is closely associated with the implementation of the Total Quality Management (TQM) principle of total involvement, which emphasizes the participation of all stakeholders in quality improvement efforts. The principal serves as a visionary leader who promotes a culture of quality, provides strategic direction, and acts as a role model for teachers and staff. Teachers and educational personnel are actively involved in curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation, ensuring that the quality of instruction remains relevant to industry requirements.

Students are not merely recipients of educational services but are also encouraged to provide feedback through discussion forums, satisfaction surveys, and self-evaluation

activities. In addition, parents, alumni, and industry partners are given opportunities to contribute constructive suggestions through communication forums and collaborative programs, including internships and competency assessments.

This comprehensive stakeholder involvement is consistent with the concept proposed by Getachew et al. (2024), who argued that employee empowerment and the active participation of organizational members are positively associated with improvements in quality and innovation capacity. In the educational context, the involvement of teachers, students, parents, and industry partners strengthens a sense of ownership toward the institution, thereby facilitating the effective implementation of curriculum policies and quality improvement initiatives.

The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in the improvement of school accreditation status, enhanced curriculum relevance to labor market demands, and positive outcomes in students' literacy, numeracy, and character development. These achievements serve as indicators of the successful implementation of TQM principles within vocational education and demonstrate the importance of collaborative stakeholder engagement in sustaining educational quality.

The Success of TQM Implementation at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon

The implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) principles at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon has produced significant outcomes. First, the accreditation status of both the school and its vocational programs has improved, indicating a measurable enhancement in educational quality. Second, the curriculum has become more aligned with industry requirements, enabling graduates to be more readily absorbed into the labor market. Third, the level of satisfaction among students, parents, and industry partners has increased, thereby strengthening the school's reputation as a vocational education institution that is responsive to contemporary challenges and changing workforce demands.

These achievements demonstrate that the systematic application of TQM principles contributes not only to institutional performance but also to the relevance and effectiveness of educational services. The integration of customer focus, continuous improvement, and stakeholder involvement has enabled the school to establish a sustainable quality culture that supports both academic and vocational excellence.

The findings are consistent with the study conducted by Mitrohardjono (2018), which revealed that the implementation of TQM in Islamic senior secondary schools (Madrasah Aliyah) positively contributes to improving students' academic achievement while simultaneously strengthening institutional quality management. Therefore, the success experienced by SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon further confirms the effectiveness of TQM as a strategic framework for enhancing educational quality and institutional competitiveness in vocational education.

The Challenges in TQM Implementation

Despite its achievements, the implementation of TQM at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon faces several challenges. One major obstacle is the limited availability of productive subject teachers who possess competencies aligned with current industrial developments. Additionally, practical learning facilities such as laboratories, computers, and technical equipment remain insufficient to fully support competency-based learning. Financial constraints also limit efforts to maintain facilities and provide continuous professional development opportunities for teachers. Furthermore, dependence on internet connectivity often creates technical challenges, particularly in digital learning environments.

These findings are consistent with Baihaqi and Yasin (2024), who emphasized that management support and human resource development are critical factors in the successful implementation of TQM in educational institutions. Without adequate resources, TQM principles cannot be implemented optimally.

The Implications for Other Educational Institutions

The experience of SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon in implementing TQM offers valuable lessons for other educational institutions, including schools and higher education institutions. By emphasizing customer focus, continuous improvement, and total involvement, educational organizations can establish a sustainable quality culture, enhance institutional reputation, and produce graduates who are more competitive in the labor market.

Furthermore, the implementation of TQM demonstrates that educational quality should not be measured solely by final outcomes but also by systematic, participatory, and data-driven processes. This perspective is supported by Adam et al. (2022), who argued that sustainable quality improvement requires integrated management practices involving all stakeholders in educational development.

E. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) provides an effective management framework for strengthening the quality of vocational education at SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon. The successful implementation of TQM is reflected not only in improvements to curriculum relevance, teacher professionalism, stakeholder satisfaction, and collaboration with industry partners, but also in the gradual development of a quality-oriented organizational culture that supports continuous improvement. These findings indicate that educational quality should be understood as a continuous organizational process rather than merely an educational outcome.

The study further suggests that the sustainability of TQM implementation depends on several interrelated factors. Strong and visionary school leadership is essential for fostering a shared commitment to quality improvement. Likewise, active participation from teachers, students, parents, alumni, industry partners, and other stakeholders

strengthens collaborative decision-making and institutional accountability. Sustainable financial support, continuous professional development, adequate learning facilities, and systematic monitoring and evaluation are equally important to ensure that quality improvement initiatives become embedded within the school's management system rather than remaining isolated programs.

Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted as a single case study in one vocational high school, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. In addition, the qualitative approach emphasizes an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences without measuring the quantitative impact of TQM implementation on institutional performance.

Future research is therefore recommended to conduct comparative studies across multiple vocational schools with different organizational characteristics and management systems. Comparative and mixed-methods studies would provide broader evidence regarding the effectiveness of TQM implementation in vocational education and contribute to the development of more comprehensive quality management models for vocational schools in Indonesia.

F. Acknowledgment

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to SMK Budi Tresna Muhammadiyah Cirebon for granting permission and providing support throughout the research process. Special appreciation is extended to the principal, teachers, educational staff, students, alumni, and industry partners who willingly participated in interviews, observations, and data collection activities.

The authors also acknowledge the valuable guidance, constructive suggestions, and academic support provided by all parties involved in the completion of this study. Their contributions have been instrumental in the successful completion of this research on the implementation of Total Quality Management (TQM) in improving educational quality at vocational schools.

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