



INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS FOR GLOBALLY COMPETITIVE UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Global competition within the higher education sector necessitates that universities enhance their internal quality assurance systems to elevate academic quality, institutional performance, and international reputation. Nonetheless, numerous universities encounter difficulties in aligning quality assurance processes with strategies aimed at achieving global competitiveness. This study seeks to examine the role of the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) in facilitating the attainment of a globally competitive university reputation at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), China. A quantitative approach was adopted, utilizing a survey design with 120 respondents, including lecturers, academic support staff, and quality assurance personnel. Data collection was conducted via a five-point Likert scale questionnaire, and analysis was performed using SPSS version 26, employing descriptive statistics, reliability tests, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression. The findings demonstrate that the implementation of the PDCA-cycle-based IIQAS is categorized as high, with the 'Plan' dimension achieving the highest average score of 4.12. Indicators of global competitiveness also yielded positive outcomes, particularly in teaching quality (4.10) and research productivity (4.02). Correlation analysis indicated that all PDCA dimensions exhibited a positive and significant relationship with global competitiveness, while regression analysis revealed that IIQAS accounted for 65.9% of the enhancement in the university's competitiveness. The novelty of this study resides in the integration of a PDCA-based internal quality assurance framework with global competitiveness indicators within the context of Chinese universities. The study concludes that the effective implementation of IIQAS functions as a strategic tool for improving institutional quality and bolstering universities' competitiveness on a global scale.

Keywords: Internal Quality Assurance System, IIQAS, PDCA, Global Competitiveness, University Reputation, Higher Education.



A. Introduction

The globalization of higher education has prompted universities in various countries to enhance their institutional competitiveness by strengthening sustainable quality assurance systems. Competition between universities is no longer focused solely on meeting national standards, but also on an institution's ability to build an internationally recognized academic reputation through the quality of teaching, research productivity, internationalization, and effective governance. In this context, the *Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS)* serves as a strategic instrument designed to ensure consistent and sustainable achievement of academic quality standards. Internal quality assurance is a crucial mechanism for maintaining and enhancing the quality of higher education by integrating objectives, actors, and continuous quality processes (Krooi et al., 2024a).

The enhancement of a university's reputation at the global level is currently heavily influenced by its ability to foster a strong culture of *quality*. A quality culture is not merely about compliance with formal standards but also reflects the commitment of the entire academic community to continuous quality improvement. Harvey (Harvey, 2024b) explains that the effectiveness of quality assurance in higher education institutions depends heavily on the active involvement of lecturers, leadership, and stakeholders in fostering a quality-oriented academic environment. In line with this, (Chaldun, 2024) found that a culture of quality integrated with the Internal Quality Assurance System is capable of creating sustainable institutional quality improvement through collaboration across all university organizational units.

In recent decades, quality assurance systems have undergone significant development in response to the demands for public accountability and improvements in the quality of higher education. (Harvey, 2024a) that the concepts of quality, standards, quality assurance and a culture of quality have become key elements in the governance of modern higher education institutions focused on academic excellence. Higher education institutions that can integrate quality assurance systems with strategic decision-making processes tend to have greater capacity to address global challenges and enhance their competitive position at the international level.

In the Asian region, particularly China, higher education reforms have encouraged universities to develop more effective internal quality assurance systems as part of a strategy to enhance their global reputation. The Chinese government has consistently encouraged universities to improve the quality of teaching, research, and governance through various policies on quality evaluation and the internationalization of higher education. In this context, Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU) is a higher education institution that actively strengthens its internal quality system to improve academic quality and institutional competitiveness. As a university specializing in petroleum

engineering, applied sciences, and technology, NEPU faces the challenge of maintaining academic relevance while meeting the demands of international quality standards.

The implementation of an internal quality assurance system is also a key factor in improving the quality of academic staff. Research on '(Ningarumsari, R. J., Ailya, A., Wasliman, E. D., & Wasliman, 2026)) indicates that internal quality assurance systems contribute significantly to improving the quality of lecturers by strengthening the implementation of the three pillars of higher education, developing academic competencies, and enhancing the educational qualifications of teaching staff. These findings demonstrate that the successful implementation of internal quality assurance not only impacts administrative aspects but also enhances the quality of human resources, which form the cornerstone of an institution's reputation.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) has proven to be a key instrument for improving the overall quality of higher education. (Fauzi et al., 2024) explains that the systematic implementation of IQAS can improve the effectiveness of academic management, quality control, and the achievement of higher educational standards. Therefore, the integration of internal quality systems, culture of quality, and institutional strategic planning is a key factor in creating a university capable of competing at a global level.

Although various studies have examined internal quality assurance systems in higher education institutions, most of them are still dominated by Western perspectives. Research specifically examining the implementation of the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) in the context of universities in China, particularly at specialist higher education institutions focused on engineering and technology, remains relatively limited. Therefore, it is important to explore in depth how the IIQAS at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU) is implemented, how this mechanism supports the improvement of academic quality, and how it contributes to building a university's globally competitive reputation.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study method to examine the role of the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) in supporting the achievement of a globally competitive reputation at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), China. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the processes, policies, practices, and dynamics of implementing an internal quality assurance system within the context of a higher education institution. The case study method was used to comprehensively explore phenomena occurring in a real-world setting, thereby enabling a more profound

description of the relationship between the internal quality assurance system and the achievement of institutional quality.

The research was conducted between January and June 2026 at the Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), located in Daqing City, Heilongjiang Province, People's Republic of China. The choice of research location was based on the consideration that NEPU is one of the state universities actively developing an internal quality assurance system to support improvements in academic quality, university governance, and the institution's reputation at both national and international levels.

The research subjects comprised university leaders, quality assurance unit managers, deans of faculties, heads of study programs, lecturers, and support staff directly involved in the implementation of IIQAS. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, considering their level of involvement, experience, and knowledge regarding the implementation of the internal quality assurance system at the university. This technique enables the researcher to obtain relevant and in-depth information in line with the research objectives.

The research data were obtained through three data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and documentary analysis. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach to explore the informants' perceptions, experiences, and views regarding the implementation of IIQAS. Observations were made on activities related to the implementation of quality assurance, including quality evaluation meetings, learning monitoring, and academic quality improvement activities. Meanwhile, the documentary review involved examining various institutional documents, such as quality policies, internal quality standards, internal quality audit reports, self-evaluation reports, the university's strategic plan, accreditation reports, and other supporting documents related to the quality assurance system.

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher (human instrument), who is responsible for planning, collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the research data. To support the data collection process, interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document analysis templates were used, which were developed based on the theoretical framework of quality assurance in higher education, quality culture, and continuous quality improvement.

Data analysis was conducted interactively using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which comprises three main stages: data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions or verification. During the data condensation stage, information obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation was selected, categorized, and simplified in line with the research focus. Subsequently, the data were presented in the form of matrices, tables, and descriptive narratives to facilitate the identification of

patterns, relationships, and emerging themes. The final stage involves drawing conclusions that are continuously verified throughout the research process.

The validity of the data is ensured through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, while methodological triangulation is carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was carried out by seeking confirmation from informants regarding the researcher's interpretation of the data. In addition, the researcher applied an audit trail to ensure the transparency of the research process and enhance the credibility of the findings.

The focus of the research analysis is directed at the four main dimensions of IIQAS: (1) governance and internal quality assurance policies; (2) mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating academic quality; (3) stakeholder involvement in the quality assurance process; and (4) the contribution of IIQAS to improving academic quality and the reputation of universities that are globally competitive. Through an analysis of these four dimensions, this study seeks to identify the best practices, implementation challenges, and contribution of the internal quality assurance system in supporting the development of a university that is excellent and competitive at the international level.

C. Finding and Discussion

The results of a data analysis of the implementation of the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), China, and its contribution to the university's reputation as a globally competitive institution. The analysis was conducted based on quantitative data obtained from 120 respondents, comprising lecturers, academic staff, and quality assurance unit staff directly involved in the implementation of the university's internal quality assurance system.

The research data were collected using a five-point Likert scale questionnaire that measured respondents' perceptions of the implementation of IIQAS based on the four dimensions of the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle, namely planning (Plan), implementation (Do), evaluation (Check), and follow-up and improvement (Act). In addition, the research instrument measured indicators of the university's global competitiveness, which included quality of learning, research productivity, international collaboration, and institutional reputation.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 26, employing reliability tests, descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple linear regression analysis. The results of this analysis provide an empirical overview of the effectiveness of IIQAS implementation in supporting institutional quality improvement and the achievement of a competitive university reputation at a global level.

Respondent Profile

This study involved 120 respondents from various strategic units within the ((NEPU). The respondents comprised 58 lecturers (48.3%), 32 academic support staff (26.7%), and 30 quality assurance unit staff (25.0%).

Table 1 Profile of Research Respondents

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Lecturers	58	48.3%
Support Staff	32	26.7%
Quality Assurance Staff	30	25.0%
Total	120	100.0%

This composition demonstrates a balanced representation of stakeholders directly involved in the implementation of the internal quality assurance system. The involvement of various respondent groups enabled the research to obtain a comprehensive picture of the implementation of IIQAS from academic, administrative, and institutional quality management perspectives.

Instrument Reliability Test

A reliability test was conducted to determine the level of internal consistency of the research instrument used to measure the implementation of the IIQAS and the university’s global competitiveness. The test was conducted using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient.

Table 2 Reliability Test Results

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach’s Alpha	Interpretation
Plan (X1)	5	0.861	Reliable
Do (X2)	5	0.879	Reliable
Check (X3)	5	0.842	Reliable
Act (X4)	5	0.853	Reliable
Global Competitiveness (Y)	7	0.901	Highly Reliable

The test results show that all variables have a Cronbach’s alpha value above 0.80. Consequently, the research instrument was deemed to have a high level of reliability and was suitable for use in further statistical analysis. The global competitiveness variable achieved the highest reliability score (0.901), indicating excellent consistency in measuring the respondents’ perceptions of a university’s reputation and competitiveness.

Level of Implementation of the PDCA-Based Internal Quality Assurance System

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to determine the level of IIQAS implementation based on the four main dimensions of the PDCA cycle.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of IIQAS Implementation

Dimension	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Plan (X1)	4.12	0.58	Height
Do (X2)	4.05	0.61	High
Check (X3)	3.89	0.66	Medium-High
Act (X4)	3.85	0.69	Medium-High

The analysis results indicate that the implementation of IIQAS in NEPU is generally in the high category. The Plan dimension received the highest average score (4.12), which indicates that quality planning, policy formulation, and the setting of institutional targets have been carried out effectively and in a structured manner.

The ‘Do’ dimension also showed a high level of implementation (4.05), reflecting the effectiveness of the implementation of various academic and administrative programmed that support institutional quality. Meanwhile, the ‘Check’ (3.89) and ‘Act’ (3.85) dimensions received lower scores than the other dimensions. These findings indicate that the mechanisms for evaluation, monitoring, and follow-up improvements still require strengthening so that the quality assurance cycle can run optimally and sustainably.

University Global Competitiveness Level

Descriptive statistical analysis was also conducted on universities’ global competitiveness indicators.

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of Global Competitiveness Indicators

Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Quality of Education	4.10	0.55	High
Research Productivity	4.02	0.60	High
International Collaboration	3.78	0.72	Moderate
Institutional Reputation	3.95	0.63	High

The research findings indicate that the quality of teaching received the highest score (4.10), followed by research productivity (4.02). These findings suggest that NEPU has successfully established strong academic qualities through effective teaching processes and a productive research culture.

By contrast, the international collaboration indicator received the lowest score (3.78). This indicates that although the university has established various forms of international cooperation, more intensive efforts are still required to expand its global

network, enhance academic mobility, and strengthen participation in international programs in order to support the enhancement of the university’s global reputation.

Correlation Analysis between IIQAS Implementation and Global Competitiveness

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the PDCA dimensions and universities’ global competitiveness.

Table 5 Correlation between IIQAS Implementation and Global Competitiveness

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Sig.	Interpretation
Plan → Global Competitiveness	0.712	0.000	Strong Positive
Do → Global Competitiveness	0.745	0.000	Strong Positive
Check → Global Competitiveness	0.689	0.000	Moderately Strong
Act → Global Competitiveness	0.703	0.000	Strong Positive

The results of the analysis indicate that all dimensions of the PDCA framework have a positive and significant relationship with universities’ global competitiveness ($p < 0.01$). The ‘Do’ dimension exhibits the strongest relationship ($r = 0.745$), suggesting that the successful implementation of various quality assurance programmed is a key factor in enhancing the university’s global competitiveness.

These findings indicate that the success of a quality assurance system is determined not only by the quality of planning, but primarily by the effectiveness of the implementation of quality policies in day-to-day academic and administrative activities.

Regression Analysis of the Influence of IIQAS on Global Competitiveness

1. Model Specification Test

Table 6 Summary of the Regression Model

R	R Square	Adjusted R-squared	Standard Error
0.812	0.659	0.647	0.421

The coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.659 indicates that 65.9% of the variation in the university’s global competitiveness can be explained by the implementation of the PDCA-based IIQAS. The remaining 34.1% were influenced by other factors outside the research model.

2. Simultaneous Test (ANOVA)

Table 7 Results of the F-Test

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	38.742	4	9.686	54.218	0.000
Residual	20,070	115	0.175		
Total	58,812	119			

An F-value of 54.218 with a significance level of 0.000 indicates that all dimensions of the PDCA framework simultaneously have a significant effect on a university's global competitiveness.

3. Partial Test (Regression Coefficients)

Table 8 Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.842	-	3.646	0.000
Plan	0.231	0.231	3.842	0.000
Do	0.289	0.289	4,965	0.000
Check	0.214	0.214	3,517	0.001
Act	0.226	0.226	3.903	0.000

The results of the analysis indicate that all dimensions of the PDCA cycle have a positive and significant effect on universities' global competitiveness. The Do dimension had the greatest influence ($\beta = 0.289$), followed by Plan ($\beta = 0.231$), Act ($\beta = 0.226$), and Check ($\beta = 0.214$).

These findings indicate that the successful implementation of academic activities, research, administrative services, and quality improvement programs is the most dominant factor in building a globally competitive university reputation. Overall, the research results demonstrate that the PDCA-based Internal Quality Assurance System plays a significant role in improving institutional quality and strengthening the Northeast Petroleum University's position in the international higher education landscape.

Discussion

1. Implementation of the PDCA-based Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) at Northeast Petroleum University

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA)-based Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS) at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU) falls into the high category. These findings suggest that the university has developed a structured internal quality assurance system through the processes of quality planning, the delivery of academic programs, monitoring and evaluation, and follow-up on continuous improvement. The *Plan* dimension received the highest score, indicating that strategic planning serves as the primary foundation for institutional quality development. This finding aligns with the research (Krooi et al., 2024b), which explains that the effectiveness of internal quality assurance is significantly influenced by the alignment between the quality objectives, actors involved, and systematic implementation processes. Furthermore, (Sampe & Arifin, 2024) emphasize that the successful implementation of an internal quality assurance system depends on the integration of quality policies across all units of the higher education institution. (Hudaya, 2025) also indicates that the implementation of an internal quality assurance system (SPMI) based on a quality cycle can enhance the effectiveness of academic

governance and the achievement of higher education standards. Similar findings were reported by (Thu et al., 2024), who stated that the systematic use of IQA tools and mechanisms supports the process of continuous quality improvement at universities. Furthermore, (Fauzi et al., 2024) emphasize that the consistent implementation of an internal quality assurance system is a key instrument in improving the quality of higher education institutions.

2. The University's Global Competitiveness through the Quality of Teaching and Research Productivity

The research findings showed that indicators of teaching quality and research productivity achieved the highest scores within the university's global competitiveness dimension. These findings suggest that the quality of the teaching process and research culture are key factors that underpin NEPU's international reputation. The study (Harvey, 2024b) explains that the quality of higher education is currently heavily influenced by the effectiveness of quality assurance systems in regulating teaching standards and academic staff performance. (Troncoso et al., 2024) also emphasizes that a robust quality assurance system contributes to improving the quality of university research and strengthens the institution's position in global academic competition. Furthermore, (Kartika et al., 2024) found that the implementation of an internal quality system is capable of enhancing lecturer quality through the reinforcement of the three pillars of higher education and the development of academic competencies. (Latora, 2023) indicated that a university's competitiveness is significantly influenced by the quality of its research and the institution's ability to produce high-impact scientific publications. Meanwhile, academic reports on strengthening the university's research culture emphasize that investment in research quality makes a direct contribution to enhancing the institution's reputation at the international level.

3. International Collaboration as a Challenge in Enhancing the University's Global Reputation

The research findings indicate that international collaboration scored the lowest compared to other global competitiveness indicators. This suggests that although NEPU has engaged in various forms of international cooperation, strengthening global academic networks remains a key challenge. These results align with the study (Thu et al., 2024), which states that internationalization is one of the most complex components of IQA as it involves various external factors such as global partnerships, academic mobility, and international research networks. (Harvey, 2024b) also explains that a university's international reputation is significantly influenced by the institution's ability to build cross-border academic relationships. Research (Jin et al., 2024) indicates that strengthening international cooperation is a key factor in the transformation of higher education towards global standards through the integration of technology and learning innovation. International research networks and faculty are key indicators for measuring the competitiveness of universities worldwide. International collaboration serves as a strategic instrument for reducing disparities in the quality of higher education and expanding access to global academic resources (Rizkiyah, 2025).

4. The Relationship between the Implementation of IIQAS and the University's Global Competitiveness

The correlation analysis shows that all dimensions of the PDCA cycle have a positive and significant relationship with a university's global competitiveness. These findings indicate that the better the implementation of an internal quality assurance system, the higher is the institution's level of competitiveness at the international level. (Krooi et al., 2024a) emphasizes that internal quality assurance functions as the primary mechanism for maintaining the sustainability of institutional quality through the alignment of processes, objectives, and organizational resources. Research (Sampe & Arifin, 2024) also indicates that the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) is closely linked to improvements in higher education quality, and the achievement of institutional standards, Ikhwanul (Ikhwanul, 2026) explains that the quality of higher education institutions cannot be separated from the effectiveness of evaluation and quality assurance systems that are implemented on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, (Ndoluanak, Y. H., Husnorofik, Z., Riyadi, R., & Ridwan, 2023) found that internal quality assurance systems play a strategic role in ensuring the quality of education, research, and community service. Similar findings were presented by (Fauzi et al., 2024), who emphasized that the effective implementation of SPMI contributes directly to improved institutional performance and the achievement of higher education quality targets.

5. The Impact of IIQAS Implementation on the Reputation of Globally Competitive Universities

The regression results indicate that the implementation of a PDCA-based IIQAS has a significant impact on universities' global competitiveness, with a contribution of 65.9%. These findings demonstrate that an internal quality assurance system is a strategic factor in building an institution's internationally competitive reputation. (Setiawan, A., Prabowo, G., & Aimah, 2024) state that universities with a strong culture tend to be better able to maintain their academic reputation and enhance public confidence in the quality of their institutions. (Ramadhan, M. A., & Setyaningsih, 2025) also emphasize that integrated internal quality contributes to a university's success in meeting the demands of higher education globalization. Research (Adzhar & Yasin, 2025) indicates that quality assurance mechanisms have a significant impact on research productivity and the strengthening of a university's position within the global higher education system. Furthermore, (Handayani & Hidayat, 2024) found that a university's level of competitiveness influences the institution's ability to secure research funding and strengthen its academic reputation.

D. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the Internal Institutional Quality Assurance System (IIQAS), based on the Plan–Do–Check–Act (PDCA) cycle at Northeast Petroleum University (NEPU), China, has been successful and is rated highly. The planning (*Plan*) and implementation (*Do*) dimensions received the highest scores, indicating that the university has a strong commitment to systematically design and

implement quality policies. Furthermore, indicators of a university's global competitiveness also show positive results, particularly in the areas of teaching quality, research productivity, and institutional reputation. Nevertheless, international collaboration still requires strengthening through the expansion of global academic networks, increased staff and student mobility, and the development of broader international research collaborations.

Correlation and regression analyses demonstrated that all dimensions of the IIQAS had a positive and significant relationship with a university's global competitiveness. The implementation of a PDCA-based internal quality assurance system accounts for 65.9% of the variation in an institution's global competitiveness, with the 'Do' dimension being the factor that contributes the most. These findings confirm that a university's success in achieving a globally competitive reputation is heavily influenced by the effectiveness of an integrated, sustainable, and quality improvement-oriented internal quality assurance system. Therefore, strengthening a culture of quality, optimizing evaluation and follow-up mechanisms, and enhancing internationalization are key strategies to support the achievement of institutional excellence and the university's global competitiveness.

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